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# World War II on the Equator: Antifascism, Gender, and Democracy in Ecuador's May Revolution of 1944

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# World War II on the Equator: Antifascism, Gender, and Democracy in Ecuador's May Revolution of 1944

## Abstract

From May 28-31, 1944, masses of indigenous, political, student, and labor groups came together in Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador, to overthrow the Liberal President Carlos Arroyo del Río and install the populist José María Velasco Ibarra for a second term. In this project I focus on the use of antifascism by a number of political and interest groups that participated in the May Revolution of 1944, the gendered makeup of the antifascist movement and the May Revolution, and the ideas of democracy held by Ecuadorians during World War II. By tracing the movements of three groups — the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario de Ecuador* (MPAE), the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE), and the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE) — new debates on the May Revolution can begin surrounding the motivations of its participants and the construction of its memory.

## Disciplines

Latin American History

## Comments

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**World War II on the Equator:  
Antifascism, Gender, and Democracy in Ecuador's May Revolution of 1944**

**Robert Franco**

2013-2014 Penn Humanities Forum  
Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Research Fellowship  
University of Pennsylvania

Senior Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Honors in  
History

Faculty Advisors: Antonio Feros, Ann Farnsworth-Alvear

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## **World War II on the Equator: An Introduction**

From May 28<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> of 1944, masses of Indigenous, political, student, and labor groups came together in Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador's two largest cities, to overthrow the Liberal President Carlos Arroyo del Río and install the populist José María Velasco Ibarra for a second term. In what has been remembered as *La Gloriosa*, men and women representing Ecuador's diverse racial and class groups participated in the revolution to end Carlos Arroyo del Río's term and rebuild Ecuador's government. Some joined the revolution on their own, while others participated as members of groups like the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women's Alliance). For three days, citizens and members of the army clashed with police forces until the abdication of Carlos Arroyo del Río on May 30th and the arrival of Velasco Ibarra to Quito the next day. After the successful removal of the Liberal president, reformers had "a time of euphoric optimism."<sup>1</sup> However, power did not remain with the leftist, Indigenous, and working-class men and women of May 28th, and many became disillusioned with Velasco Ibarra soon after the May Revolution of 1944.

This thesis will focus on the use of antifascism by a number of political and interest groups that participated in the May Revolution of 1944. In the midst of World War II, antifascism gained followers from the left, right, and center who could agree that Nazism, Falangism, and Italian Fascism posed a threat to democratic republics around the world. Antifascism generated a rare moment of collaboration and alliances. Additionally, for traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and Indigenous peoples, it became a means of entering into political dialogue. In the Ecuadorian case, these collaborations

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 77.



Map of Ecuador and its Major Cities

and political maneuvering can be seen in the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario de Ecuador* (MPAE; Popular Anti-totalitarian Movement of Ecuador), the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance), and the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women's Alliance) — three groups which have never been analyzed together, but who collaborated before and after the outbreak of the May Revolution. In exploring their gendered makeup and use of antifascism for strategic alliance building, new debates can begin on the motivations, participants, and memory of the revolution.

As part of the “Democratic Spring” of revolutions in Latin America during World War II, Ecuador provides an interesting case study on the way international ideologies penetrated and developed in Latin America. During the 1930s, as Italian Fascism, Spanish Falangism, and German Nazism gained traction in Europe, fascism also gained a foothold in Ecuador. In 1935, the Ecuadorian military removed José María Velasco Ibarra during his first presidency. The military, which had been active in Ecuadorian politics since the late 1920s, then installed as supreme chief an obscure engineer by the name of Federico Paéz, thanks to the political maneuvering of his nephew, Alberto Enríquez Gallo. Initially an ally of leftists, Federico Paéz made a rapid shift to the right in 1936 as the Spanish Civil War began, largely due to an attempted *coup d'état* by some radical members of the Socialist Party. The attempted coup of 1936 catalyzed the beginning of Paéz’s persecution of the left and fascist styles of repression. His policies began converting Ecuador into a police state until his removal by a coup in 1937. Fortunately for the Communist and Socialist Parties, Paéz’s nephew and successor, Alberto Enríquez Gallo, lifted the restrictions on the left and restored many of the civil liberties that were banned under his uncle’s administration. Gallo’s regime was also short lived, and in 1938, the Liberal Aurelio Mosquera Narvaéz ascended to the presidency. He was followed by Carlos Arroyo del Río in 1940.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, the Ecuadorian left (composed of Socialists, Communists, and Vanguard Revolutionaries) had developed a nascent antifascist stance due to the regime of Paéz. Socialists, Communists, and Vanguard Revolutionaries had also begun the process of forming a Popular Front to gain representation in government.

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<sup>2</sup> Niall Binns, *Ecuador y la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Calambur, 2012), 32-39.



As stated, antifascism, like elsewhere, provided a doctrine that allowed for the formation of alliances between leftists, independent Liberals, Conservatives, and Indigenous groups. Antifascist ideology laid the important groundwork of alliances that would crystallize under the increasingly repressive of Carlos Arroyo del Río, and they would eventually culminate in the united front that led the May Revolution of 1944. However, in Ecuador, the application of antifascism manifested more concretely in men and women's engagement with distinctly Ecuadorian realities. Furthermore, antifascism and ideals of democracy provided opportunities for women and Indigenous groups to integrate themselves into national political discourse. Finally, the Ecuadorian case highlights how antifascist alliances, although powerful enough to lead a revolution, were nonetheless built on shaky terrain. The power dynamics in these alliances were unevenly distributed and, as a result, broke down easily. The end product was a construction of the revolution's memory that omitted marginalized actors from the historical narrative.

The Liberal Party dominated Ecuadorian politics during the 1940s. Liberals had gained control of the country in 1895, and like elsewhere, stood for free-market economic policies that benefitted its export commodity elites. The Liberal president Carlos Arroyo del Río won the presidency in January of 1940 against the populist José María Velasco Ibarra and Jacinto Jijon of the Conservative party. However, much like the rest of Latin America, electoral fraud was a common occurrence in Ecuadorian politics. Upon the announcement of his win, accusations of fraud raised questions as to the legitimacy of his election, fueling riots throughout the country. For many women, Indigenous groups, and leftists, Arroyo del Río's election represented the continuation of oligarchic hegemony and discrimination in Liberal policies.

Further dissent arose upon the loss of territory in the 1941 Ecuadorian-Peruvian War. Shortly after Arroyo del Río's election, tensions between the two countries reached an apex, and from July 5 to July 31, 1941, Ecuador fought a disastrous war with Peru over long disputed territory in the Amazon. For twenty-six days, Ecuadorians raised money to support the troops and wrote letters appealing to international bodies while denouncing Peru's militarism. The war ended when both countries agreed to a ceasefire on July 31. In January of 1942, the United States, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil became guarantors of the 1941 Rio Protocol, a treaty that ceded almost half of Ecuador's national territory (mostly in the Amazon and southern highlands) to Peru. Carlos Arroyo del Río's enemies would attack his failure to arm the populace, question his masculinity and ability to lead the country, and balk at his acquiescence to US influence.

The 1940 election and 1941 war, however, were only two of a long series of crises that plagued Ecuador in the first half of the twentieth century. Ecuador's economic and political struggles did not occur in a vacuum, and during the 1930s, the Great Depression's global economic impact resulted in unprecedented levels of strikes, tension, and conflict between the Liberal government and Ecuadorian labor groups. Ecuador's raw export economy, which benefitted the Liberal Party's agro-export monopoly, was built on the exploitation of Ecuadorian workers for the sake of US markets. The country's Socialist and Communist Parties, founded in 1926 and 1931, respectively, took up the voices of Ecuadorian labor. However, both remained marginalized parties in Ecuador until their participation in the May Revolution of 1944.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The growth of labor unrest, the development of Socialist and Communist parties, and the Indigenous uprisings during the century have all been of which have been extensively studied by scholars. For example, see: Osvaldo Albornoz Peralta, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial

With World War II and the rise of antifascist sentiment, Ecuadorians from all political ideologies took part in the transnational movement in order to advance their causes. The antifascist movement in Ecuador was nurtured by the French expatriate Raymond Meriguet, who founded the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario Ecuatoriano* (MPAE) in 1941. It quickly grew throughout the country, enabling unprecedented alliances among Ecuadorians under a single goal of eliminating fascism. Ecuadorians who joined the antifascist movement embraced its dual ability to address the global spread of totalitarianism and crusade for broader democracy at home. For politically active women, the fight against fascism provided a unique opportunity to insert women's voices in domestic political dialogue and gain equal civil rights. The *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE), founded in 1938 by the Communist militant Nela Martinez, utilized antifascism in its fight for the labor and political rights of women from diverse racial and social classes.

The sociopolitical objectives for the May Revolution of 1944, therefore, can be clearly traced in the state building of the Liberal regime in Ecuador and the discontent of Ecuador's general populace. As Kim Clark emphasizes, the state and political parties must be considered as both obstructions and creators of opportunities for marginalized groups, since "it is more useful to consider how state projects changed the terrain on which individuals could act, enabling certain possibilities and constraining others."<sup>4</sup>

While the Liberal state did offer some Ecuadorians a rhetoric and ideology from which to

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Letranueva, 1983); Richard L. Milk, *Movimiento obrero ecuatoriano: el desafío de la integración* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 1997) and Patricio Ycaza, *Historia Del Movimiento Obrero Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Centro De Documentación E Información De Los Movimientos Sociales Del Ecuador, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Kim Clark, *Gender, State, and Medicine in Highland Ecuador: Modernizing Women, Modernizing the State, 1895-1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 3.

protest their political exclusion, it consistently failed to bring about the level of reform desired by leftists and Indigenous peoples.

In the intersection of the political history of Ecuador and the studies of the May Revolution of 1944, one figure stands out: José María Velasco Ibarra. From Juan Perón in Argentina and Getúlio Vargas in Brazil to Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Colombia, the nature and styles of populists have catalyzed debates among historians for decades. No longer understood as a simple demagogic process of manipulation of the masses by a charismatic orator, populism remains a contested term in the historiography. In Latin America, populism attempted to replace oligarchical politics. However, understanding populism as a multi-class movement under a leader's nationalist rhetoric does not explain the subjective experiences and personal agendas of the women who supported Velasco Ibarra. Carlos de la Torre has argued for an adaptable, multi-faceted nature to populism. Although retaining the basic dynamics of a charismatic orator vis-à-vis the people, populism must be understood as an interactive experience for both the leader and the people. Men and women participated in the metaphoric battle with the oligarchy for their own advancement. Meanwhile, the masses strengthened the political power of their populist leader, whose rhetoric further divided society between *el pueblo* and the oligarchy. As a historical agent, Velasco Ibarra was, therefore, both self-constructed and socially constructed, as was the revolution that brought him into power.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the role of populism, analyses have primarily utilized Marxism as the primary lens for approaching the revolution.<sup>6</sup> While the reasoning of class conflict is

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<sup>5</sup> Carlos De La Torre, *La Seducción Velasquista* (Quito: FLACSO, Sede Ecuador, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Vega Ugalde, *La Gloriosa: de la revolución del 28 de mayo de 1944 a la contrarrevolución velasquista* (Colección Ecuador/Historia, Quito: Editorial El Conejo, 1987).

valid, it does not explain the experiences of women in the revolution, their decisions to join the movement on May 28, or their attempts to utilize antifascism and the revolution to expand political rights. This new study on Ecuador will critically analyze the effects of gender on the experiences of men and women in the revolution, but it will also follow the goal of restoring a long neglected region and set of women to Latin American historiography. In reconstructing the history of the women's group, the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana*, and restoring their place in the narrative of the May Revolution of 1944, a new understanding can be reached as to their aspirations and agency. Since gender can be "constitutive of social relationships" and key in understanding constructions of hierarchy, one must use gender analysis to approach the relationships, power dynamics, and interactions between men and women in the May Revolution. Doing so begins the process of deciphering the May Revolution's skewed results and the subsequent erasure of women.<sup>7</sup>

The space of a revolution also allowed for the contestation of masculinities. In the 1941 Ecuadorian-Peruvian War and the subsequent revolution, Ecuadorians assigned active and passive roles to nations and their leaders. The contested meaning of masculinity and politics in during the 1940s helped to construct the memory of the May Revolution of 1944 as a male-centered event despite the obvious participation of women. As scholars have noted, women contribute equally to history, but it is within the writing of history, the construction of the archive, and the fabrication of historical memory where

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<sup>7</sup> Heidi Tinsman, "A Paradigm of Our Own: Joan Scott in Latin American History." *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1366.

women are erased.<sup>8</sup> Documentation of the May Revolution of 1944 has centered on the contributions of men, and the subsequent writing of its history has followed suit. In order to analyze the role of women, one must approach the archive understanding that certain voices were edited, redacted, and deleted by those higher on the hierarchy of power. This study utilizes previously unused and underused accounts, oral and written testimonies, letters, and reports, in order to reconstruct a moment of women's independent organizing.

Finally, Ecuadorian styles of feminism should also be placed in their historical context. As Sarah Radcliffe has noted, studies of women's movements in Ecuador must stress the ethnic, regional, and class diversity of the region.<sup>9</sup> Since women exist as a heterogeneous group, the term feminism can be broadly defined following the parameters set out by Gregory Hammond and June Hahner. Feminists, in the historical context, can be anyone who saw themselves as "opponents of gender inequality" including members of both the left and the right who "sought essential improvements in the daily lives of all women."<sup>10</sup> A member of AFE could choose, and often did, a form of feminism that demanded equality precisely on the grounds of being a wife or a mother.

This thesis will also follow the emerging trend of placing Latin American countries in the context of World War II.<sup>11</sup> It will primarily look at leftists, women, and

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<sup>8</sup> Becker, *Indians*, 8; Other studies in the omission of women in history include: Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009) and Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Sarah A. Radcliffe, "Women's Movements in Twentieth-Century Ecuador," in *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, and Politics*, eds. Carlos De La Torre and Steve Striffler (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 284-285.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Hammond, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Feminism in Argentina from Roca to Perón* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2011), 9; June Edith Hahner, *Emancipating the Female Sex: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil, 1850-1940* (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Such literature includes: Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel, eds., *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) and Antônio Pedro Tota, *The Seduction of Brazil: The Americanization of Brazil during World*

Indigenous groups in order to trace their use of ideologies and strategies, like the Popular Front, to gain key rights at home. By closely examining marginalized men and women and their use of antifascism in the contexts of war, reform, and revolution, one can gain a nuanced understanding as to the meaning of democracy in Ecuador's May Revolution of 1944. Beyond simply analyzing the Liberal state, this thesis studies transnational movements and international ideas as arenas that leftists, women, and Indigenous groups utilized for their own political advancement. Not only can the revolution be seen as a space for reform, but antifascism itself also provided an ideology that marginalized groups could use to redistribute political power, if only briefly.

Finally, in approaching fascism, this thesis follows the style of Wolfgang Wipperman, Roger Griffin, and to some extent, Sven Reichardt, in the application of "generic fascism" as a useful heuristic tool in order to historicize and analyze German Nazism, Italian Fascism, and Spanish Falangism in a common language. Recognizing the singularity of Nazism, this use of generic fascism allows one to reference Nazism in the same ideological branch as Italian Fascism, and it rejects the idea that the former cannot be referred to in the same manner as the latter. Utilizing Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as "a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" accompanied by traditional "stylistic features" like the pervasive use of symbols and a single party under the control of a charismatic leader opens the terrain for a broad analysis why antifascism appeared in

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*War II*, trans. Lorena B. Ellis (Austin: University of Texas, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, 2009).

Ecuador.<sup>12</sup> Fascism, then, can describe almost any “authoritarian or militaristic nationalism” which, to Ecuadorians, applied to the government of Carlos Arroyo del Río and explains the growth of antifascist sentiment in the 1940s.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, fascism was not a uniquely Italian or German phenomenon and cannot simply be confined to inter-war Europe, but instead it was a global phenomenon that could organically manifest itself in Asia, Latin America, etc. in a variety of forms based on regional contexts.<sup>14</sup> At least, this rule should apply as much as Ecuadorians at the time seemed to have *believed* that fascism could manifest and spread out from Spain, Italy or Germany and appear in Ecuador, thus justifying an antifascist movement. Fascism as an umbrella term, therefore, allows for distinct forms yet references region-specific styles interchangeably in a fluid manner. Whatever their differences, the antifascist movement in Ecuador was focused on eliminating all forms of fascism. Ecuadorians treated Nazism and Italian Fascism as two sides of the same Axis coin.

In the end, this work will address critically under-theorized gendered and international aspects of the May Revolution of 1944. Placing Velasco Ibarra in the background, instead of the forefront, of the revolution reveals the diverse aspirations of its participants. An analysis of antifascism, instead of populism, shows how historical agents adapted international ideologies and utilized them to expand the terrain of politics and engage with domestic issues. The May Revolution of 1944 strengthened antifascist

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Griffin, “Fascism’s new faces (and new facelessness) in the ‘post fascist’ epoch,” in *Fascism past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, eds. Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006), 39-41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 32; Kevin Passmore, “Generic fascism and the historians,” in *Fascism past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, eds. Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006), 170.



alliances and provided a brief moment for the reevaluation of power dynamics in the country. For marginalized groups, antifascism and revolution became the means of addressing grievances and obtaining political rights. Unfortunately, the alliances held together by antifascism unraveled upon the end of the revolution, and in the reconstruction of the revolution's popular memory, marginalized groups were erased by omission. Only with a gendered lens can one see the revolutionary bodies of Indigenous, leftist, and radical women in synchronization with those of men, and only with an international perspective can one trace Ecuadorian understandings of antifascism and democracy in their May Revolution of 1944.

## Chapter 1

### **The Birth of a Movement: The *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* and the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana***

When the government of the Liberal president Carlos Arroyo del Río arrested the antifascist leader Raymond Mériguet in the fall of 1943, critics argued that it was merely another symptom of the increasing fascist styles of repression that the Liberal regime utilized. Antifascism, an ideology advocated by the group *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* (MPAE; The Popular Anti-totalitarian Movement of Ecuador), had come to represent a defense of democracy and desire to expand political rights in Ecuador. By the 1940s, the Liberal government and president Carlos Arroyo del Río encompassed the antithesis of both the broad democracy envisioned by Ecuador's progressive left, and partisan politics championed by the Catholic and Conservative right. The coalition of Conservatives, independent Liberals, students, leftists and Indigenous groups known as the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance) challenged the Liberal Party's presidential bid in the 1943-1944 elections, choosing instead to back the populist politician José María Velasco Ibarra. This coalition emerged, in part, thanks to the dialogue initiated by the antifascist movement. For Communists and leftists like Raymond Mériguet and Nela Martínez, antifascism provided a means of enacting reform in Ecuador, while for Conservatives and independent Liberals, it furnished a rhetoric to criticize electoral fraud and settle territorial disputes. Antifascism encouraged the alliance of both camps and channeled their diverse desires towards the single goal of removing Carlos Arroyo del Río from power.

As a transnational movement, antifascism raised awareness and concern over the spread of Nazism, Italian Fascism and Falangism around the globe. However, in Ecuador, the concerns of members of the MPAE largely appeared in the form of projects aimed at the country's social issues, such as illiteracy and aid to disaster victims, alongside messages of international solidarity. As the 1944 elections grew closer, the domestic concerns of the antifascist movement in Ecuador blended with growing discontent over the Liberal regime, and members of MPAE began allying with the coalition of ADE. Antifascism provided a single cause for a spectrum of Ecuadorians to unite under without alienating members of the radical left or right. It blended seamlessly with Comintern instructions for a Popular Front and opposed the Axis powers. By exploring the origins of antifascism in Ecuador, the domestic engagement and projects of its members, and their appeals for international attention to Ecuador's role in hemispheric unity, one can arrive at a new understanding of the May Revolution of 1944 and its place in the history of World War II.

Members of Ecuador's antifascist movement constituted some of the most diverse and important reformist voices at the time, including Pedro Saad, Enrique Gil Gilbert, Zoila Ugarte de Landivar, Raymond Mériquet, and Nela Martinez. Many of the progenitors of the movement were members of the Communist Party, or at least identified with the political left, but their voices joined a swath of ideologies to craft an Ecuadorian stance against totalitarianism in accordance with the Allies. The bifurcated aims of the antifascist movement, domestic engagement and international solidarity, stemmed from a desire to increase the political leverage of Ecuador on the international stage during

World War II, to legitimize Ecuador's territorial disputes, and to expand the ranks of antifascists at home.

### **The Origins of Fascism and Antifascism in Ecuador**

The 1940s experienced the golden age of antifascism as Allied propaganda spread globally, but the Ecuadorian movement can trace its own roots to the 1930s as Falangist and Italian Fascist ideology penetrated the globe during the Great Depression. Leftists in Ecuador, members of the Communist Party (1931) and the Socialist Party (1926), first utilized what can be considered nascent antifascist rhetoric during the 1932 presidential elections. In their fight against the Conservative candidate Neptalí Bonifaz, leftists infused their rhetoric of anti-bourgeois nationalism with antifascist dialogue, coining the term “bonifascism” to describe the politics of Bonifaz and his Party. Bonifascism (*bonifascismo*) was the label for Conservative authoritarianism, characterized by a lack of popular support and the defense of upper-class political hegemony. It also defended clerical aristocracy and bourgeois democracy typical in Latin American politics.<sup>1</sup> In August of 1932, when an alliance of leftists and Liberals in Congress nullified Neptalí Bonifaz's election on the grounds of his Peruvian ancestry, civil war broke between the two camps, although Communists refused to ally with the Socialists and Liberals whom they called “bourgeois leftists.” Communists also viewed the civil war as nothing but a power grab between “bonifascism, through bribery, religious fanaticism and false promises of the purification of government” and “its adversaries, whose majority was and still is the capitalist block of the Coast through means of demagoguery and nationalist

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<sup>1</sup> “Luchamos Contra el Bonifascismo,” *El Comunista* 4, Quito, August 11, 1932, 1.

sentiment.”<sup>2</sup> After Bonifaz’s removal, new elections were held in 1932, bringing Juan de Dios Martínez of the Liberal Party to the presidential palace. Nascent antifascism strengthened under the right-wing government of Federico Páez (1935-1936) and reached its full maturity by the beginning of the 1940s, led by Ecuador’s progressive left and intellectuals.

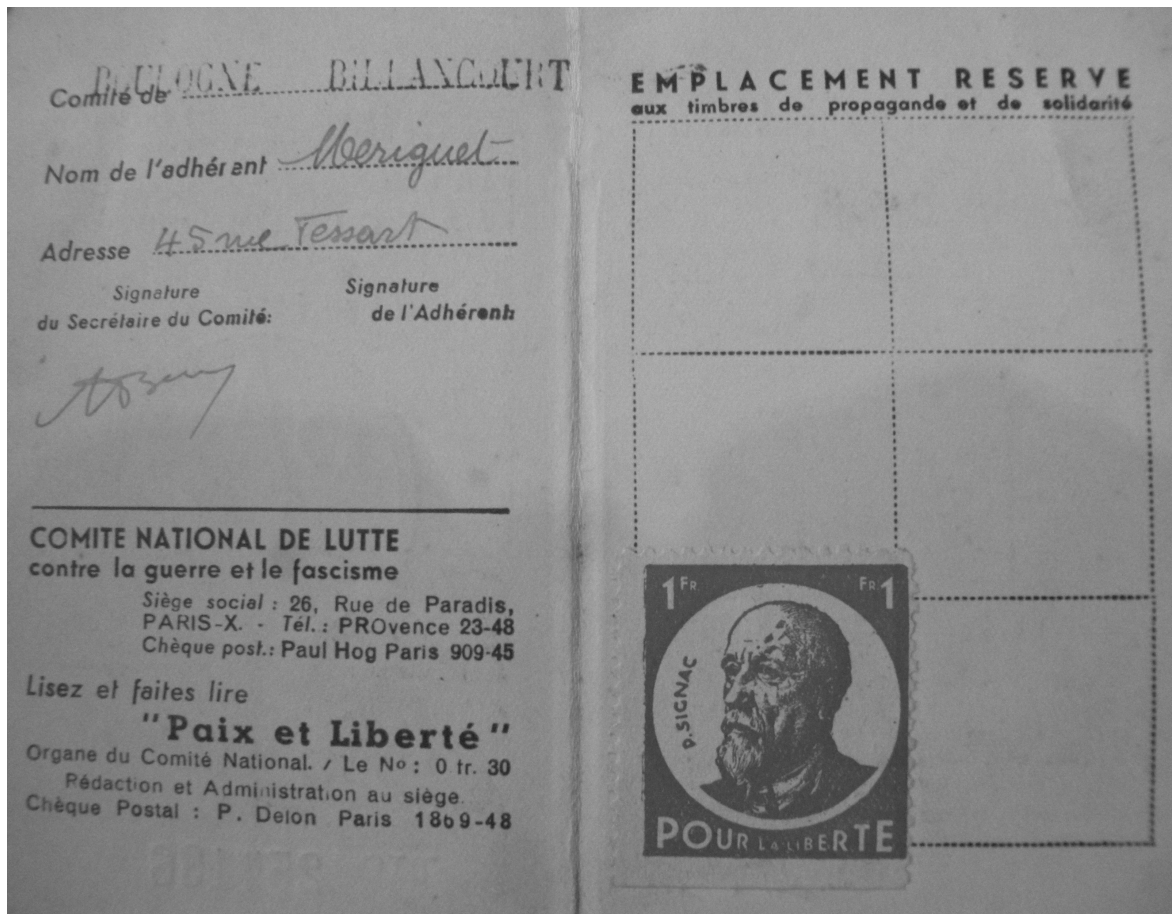
Through the 1930s, political parties steadily developed antifascist tenets. It was at this time that Communists and leftists were encouraged to follow the Popular Front strategy and ally with Liberals and Conservatives against their common enemies. As a result, leftists in Ecuador, like elsewhere, began more closely collaborating on domestic causes and struggles. In 1928, when the Comintern pushed for greater rural-labor alliances, Ricardo Paredes, founder of Ecuador’s Socialist Party, began to make initial contacts with Indigenous organizations that had developed in the countryside during the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> In October of 1931, when Ecuador’s Socialist Party officially became the Communist Party of Ecuador (PCE), this engagement continued. In their fight against Federico Páez and through their anti-Falangist essays on the Spanish Civil War during the 1930s, Communist and Socialist intellectuals and writers, such as Enrique Gil Gilbert and Joaquín Gallegos Lara, laid the groundwork in Quito and Guayaquil for antifascism to flourish in the 1940s.

On August 9, 1938, an earthquake hit the Chillos Valley outside of Quito, destroying hundreds of homes and displacing many families. Almost immediately, a twenty-seven-year old French expatriate named Raymond Mériquet, along with the

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<sup>2</sup> “La sublevación de Agosto,” *El Comunista* 6, Quito, September 17, 1932, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 34-35.



Raymond Meriguet's *Carte d'Adherent*, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, July 14, 1935.

Committee of Foreigners (*Comite de Extranjeros*), began the Committee of Popular *Mingas* (*Comite "Mingas Populares"*) to gather funds and give aid to those affected by the disaster.<sup>4</sup> Mériguet had arrived in Ecuador in 1936 with his Ecuadorian wife, Zoila Váscenez, after having worked with the Communist Party of France to raise support for the Spanish Republic in Boulogne.<sup>5</sup> He and his new *Comite* were given only five hundred *suces* worth of materials from the Committee of Foreigners and a handful of volunteers

<sup>4</sup> *Mingas* is a form of labor where one is paid with food or materials instead of money; The term has significant importance for the type of organizing done and its political implications, especially since it was organized by Mériguet, a Communist.

<sup>5</sup> Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 76.

to rebuild the region.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite these adversities, Mériguet continued to organize *Mingas Populares* throughout the months of August and September, calling on the people of Ecuador, especially the working class, to aid their fellow Ecuadorians in rebuilding over five hundred homes in the Valley. He stated, “[t]o our colleagues, to the people of Quito! We call you to our side, to unite our arms in a common cause, voluntarily, to come to the aid of our brothers, exhausted by the cold, without a home and without even a roof to protect their wives and children.”<sup>7</sup> Mériguet’s *mingas* brought together foreigners, Ecuadorians, men, and women from different social classes to meet on Sundays and drive out to the countryside. Funds for the Committee largely came from the private donations that Mériguet solicited through public advertisements, letters, and cards sent to prominent foreigners and Ecuadorians. During the months he spent with disaster victims, Mériguet wrote to the government asking for monetary aid and other forms of support. For example, on September 15, 1938, he wrote to the Minister of Defense thanking him for the use of military vehicles to transport volunteers, but noted that the work was not complete.<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1938, Mertiguét’s volunteers had increased to over six hundred, and his work in the *Comite “Mingas Populares”* demonstrated the independent organizing efforts of Ecuadorians and foreigners, leftist engagement with domestic issues, and attempts to enter into dialogue with the government.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Ecuadorian *sucre* was valued at about 13.5 *sucres* = 1 American dollar during this time; “Auxilio de la Clase Obrera a los Damnificados por el Terremoto,” *El Dia*, Quito, August 20, 1938.

<sup>7</sup> El Comité Mingas Populares, “Solidaridad para los Pueblos de Los Chillos,” flyer, 1938, doc. 4, Papeles Comité Mingas, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Mériguet to the Minister of Defense, September 15, 1938, doc. 11, Papeles Comité Mingas, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>9</sup> “Mingeros Todos”, “Mingas Populares” and “500 Participaron”, August 1938, leaflets, doc. 9-11, Papeles Comité Mingas, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador; “Mingas Populares Ayudan a los Damnificados por el Terremoto,” *Noticia de Guayaquil*, Guayaquil, August 22, 1938.





Unidentified photographer, Images from the *Comite "Mingas"* project to rebuild homes, Archivo Martínez Meriguet, 1938, Valle de los Chillos, photos.



*Mingas* provided an opportunity for collaboration between men and women of distinct social classes without government interference, mobilizing hundreds of Ecuadorians to help the region. Many benefactors and volunteers of the movement also took the opportunity to criticize the government for its lack of aid, and the politicization of the projects of *Mingas* reveals early frustrations of Ecuadorians. Following methods of the Popular Front, Raymond Mériguet engaged with Ecuadorian realities in order to create cross-class alliances and demonstrate the organizational power of the working class. Mériguet, in turn, gained experience in mobilizing Ecuadorians, a key skill in his antifascist efforts afterwards. In fact, he later stated that the earliest participants in the antifascist movement were those who had joined the *Mingas* in 1938.<sup>10</sup>

### **Birth of MPAE**

Raymond Mériguet continued working and organizing in Ecuador, increasing his efforts as Hitler began his campaigns against France in 1940. On October 31, 1941, Mériguet and a group of his friends called together a caucus to examine the fascist situation in both Ecuador and abroad. Raymond Mériguet and Gustavo Becerra led the meeting, which elected the provisional executive committee of a new organization named the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* (MPAE; The Popular Anti-totalitarian Movement of Ecuador). The committee consisted of Mériguet, Becerra, Arturo Nieto, Juan Brünn, and Anibal Oña. Upon the formal foundation of the MPAE on November 21, 1941, MPSE added Eduardo Daste Llorente, Clotario E. Paz, Newton

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<sup>10</sup> David Amores to the President of the National Committee of Aid, September 22, 1938, doc. 12, Papeles Comité Mingas, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador; Jose Escobar and Alfredo Campodonico to Raymond Mériguet and Davis Amores, September 10, 1938, doc. 8, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador; Raymond Mériguet, Nota Preliminar, *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), iv-v.

Moreno, and the Communist militant and noted women's activist Nela Martinez, to its leadership.<sup>11</sup> The group's five core tenets included:

1. The complete destruction of Nazism and its allies
2. The persecution of totalitarianism in Ecuador
3. The reintegration of the lands aggressively taken from Ecuador [by Peru]
4. The liberation and aid to subjugated countries: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, etc.
5. Solidarity with the countries at war with the Axis: the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and China.<sup>12</sup>

While other antifascist groups had sprung up during the 1940s, and political parties, organizations, and unions all formally declared antifascism as a tenet of their beliefs, MPAE commanded the most national influence and remained the most visible organization throughout the decade.<sup>13</sup> Beyond manifestos and publications, MPAE organized a number of national assemblies that brought together antifascists from all over the country. To counteract criticisms of MPAE's leftist ties, Mériquet emphasized the groups' acceptance of all political and philosophical ideologies as long as they rejected Italian Fascism, Spanish Falangism and Nazism. In doing so, he demonstrated the strategic use of antifascism in holding together a broad political coalition of diverse ideologies. As a branch of a transnational movement, MPAE was outspoken over its

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Mériquet, *Contra la Bestia Nazi* (Quito: Imprenta Fernandez, 1943), 19-23.

<sup>12</sup> MPAE Membership Card in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériquet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Other antifascist groups included: *Movimiento Trabajadores Antifascistas del Ecuador* (Movement of Antifascist Workers of Ecuador), the *Comite "Nacional Pro-Aliados"* (National Pro-Ally Committee), the *Núcleo Antifascista Peninsular* (Core of Peninsular Antifascists), and domestic and regional committees which affiliated with MPAE, like the *Movimiento Antifascista de Guayaquil* (Antifascist Movement of Guayaquil).



# ANTINAZI

Organo del Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador  
EDICION DE OCHO PAGINAS

Quito, Marzo 12 de 1942

Valor 10 ctvs.

Año 19 N° 1

FABRICA BOMBARDEADA



SUMARIO:—Editorial, Estamos en Guerra, La Juventud, Vanguardia en la Lucha Antifascista, Los Trabajadores Frente al Nacismo, Cuento para Adultos, Los Trabajadores de la Capital Reciben al Senador de Méjico A. Sanchez Madariaga, Nuestra Ubicacion en el Frente Mundial de las Democracias.

LA VOZ DE FRANCIA

## Estamos en Guerra

Erramos filas en nombre de un principio vital de conservación. Nuestro puesto en la lucha—señalado por la urgencia de la hora—tiene en esta hoja semanal una de sus expresiones. ANTINAZI será la voz de hombres con ardiente conciencia de su responsabilidad. Y su palabra inicial, la que ha de expresar un fervoroso saludo a las fuerzas progresistas del País.

EL MOVIMIENTO POPULAR ANTITOTALITARIO DEL ECUADOR decididamente ha tomado la vanguardia de la lucha antinazista. Sus formaciones de combate, universalizando el sentido del ataque y de la defensa—sobre las ideologías políticas, las concepciones filosóficas y las procedencias nacionales—aspiran a mantener en el pueblo del Ecuador su esencia de libertad.

Continente Americano, no podía dejar de tomar partido al lado de las democracias.

Esta posición comporta, necesariamente, una beligerancia. El ejemplo de los débiles Estados centroeuropeos, que cayeron víctimas de la ferocidad hitleriana, constituye nuestra gran experiencia. Y sabremos aprovecharla. La aprovecharemos persiguiendo implacablemente a la quinta columna, que traidoramente trabaja en la preparación del camino fácil para lanzar su golpe de gracia contra América. La aprovecharemos fortaleciendo el frente de los aliados en su lucha contra el Eje. La aprovecharemos clarificando conceptos y posiciones. La aprovecharemos con las medidas más oportunas para descubrir a quienes traicionan los intereses americanos.

Extendida a los cinco continentes la conflagración guerrera que desencadenan las camarillas facistas, sentimos entrañablemente el llamado de la lucha. Y el Ecuador, como los demás pueblos del

Los millones de hombres que en la Unión Soviética, el Africa y el Pacífico entregan sus vidas en la guerra contra la desangrada bestia nazista, se sacrifican no solamente por sus propios pueblos. Sus

Para la página 8

concern with World War II and international fascism.<sup>14</sup> However, in its domestic engagement, MPAAE demonstrated the application of antifascist ideology to regional circumstances.

Members of MPAAE raised funds and paid membership dues for maintenance and projects, which included publishing the group's bi-weekly magazine, *Antinazi*. Founded in March of 1942, *Antinazi* served as the official voice of the movement and provided a space for Ecuadorians to read and write on international affairs. Reaching an audience from about 1000 to 5000 Ecuadorians each issue, *Antinazi* yielded information on topics such as Mussolini, the war in the Pacific, and movements of Allied troops. But, more importantly, it also reported on Ecuador's own political developments. In later issues, the magazine focused more exclusively on pertinent threats in the Americas by tracking the advancement of fascism in American countries like Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru. Throughout its print run, *Antinazi* spread messages of labor reform in the country, stressing the need for Ecuador's unions and organizations to align against fascism.<sup>15</sup>

The goal of preventing the growth of domestic fascism legitimized the activities of MPAAE, especially upon the discovery of alleged Nazi activity in *Casa Alemana* (German House) in Quito. On September 8, 1942, the Catholic labor periodical *La Defensa* reported that despite official reports to the contrary, Nazi organization existed in

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<sup>14</sup> "Precisemos Conceptos," *El Debate*, November 22, 1941 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 12; Mériguet, *Bestia*, 24, 33; "Saludo del Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador al General Charles de Gaulle," July 14, 1942 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 80; "Nueva ola de terror pardo en Europa," *Antinazi* 4, Quito, May 9, 1942, 6; Jorge Jalif to Ricardo Paredes, July 15, 1945, Cartas 61-90, C-007, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador; For a more in depth study of Ecuadorian views on the Spanish Civil War, see Niall Binns, *Ecuador y la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Calambur, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> *Antinazi* 21, June 26, 1943; Mériguet, *Bestia*, 28-30; *Antinazi* 1, March 12, 1942.



Unidentified photographer, Alleged Nazis in Casa Alemana, Quito, 1942, photo, in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 120.

Ecuador. The proof lay in leaked photos that showed twenty-six men, women, and children outside of *Casa Alemana* dressed in Nazi garb. The periodical also managed to identify a number of members and printed their names, including Heinz Schulte, a prominent landowner in Ecuador.<sup>16</sup> For members of MPAE, the photo served as a warning of fascism's penetration of the country and demonstrated that Ecuador could harbor fascism if conditions in the country were opportune. The existence of a totalitarian government, which suppressed labor and prevented universal suffrage (a reputation that Carlos Arroyo del Río's government was slowly gaining), meant the engendering of

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<sup>16</sup> "Tropas de Asalto en Nuestra Capital," "La gestapo en acción: La "hacienda" de Heinz Schulte" and "Cuantos Alumnos de Oranienburg hay en el Ecuador?," *La Defensa*, Quito, September 8, 1942; While much of this could be considered yellow journalism or paranoia, the importance of this document is that it shows the high level of Ecuadorian concern for domestic nazism.

fascism. And their concerns were not entirely unfounded. During the 1940s, the hyper-nationalist, anticommunist group *Acción Revolucionaria Nacionalista Ecuatoriana* (ARNE; Revolutionary Nationalist Action of Ecuador) emerged following the success of General Franco's Nationalist army in Spain. ARNE became a larger movement in the 1950s, but Nela Martínez and other antifascists realized that its extreme right-wing politics threatened to derail Ecuador's nascent labor movement and could potentially destroy the Communist Party. As a result, they acted during ARNE's formative period to sway the populace against them.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the domestic fascist threat, leaders of MPAE also used antifascist ideology to address Ecuador's problems of poverty and illiteracy. These issues were reinterpreted as a danger to global security and a failure on the part of democratic governments. A column in *Antinazi* read:

These words of Roosevelt [against Nazism], we embrace as our own...These words have reached the youth of Ecuador, to all our mestizo and Indian youth. Many of our young have read the words of Roosevelt, but the majority was not able to, since many of them do not find themselves in the economic situation to buy the press, while the rest cannot read or write. But it is our duty and our obligation to make this message from across the seas reach them all, since Roosevelt spoke for all of the world's youth.<sup>18</sup>

As another means of domestic engagement, MPAE organized exhibitions of artists like Eduardo Kingman in order to increase nationalism and initiate dialogue surrounding democracy since "art yields its contribution of sensibility, affirming the rights of man over his land."<sup>19</sup> Kingman's art dealt with the struggles and realities faced by Ecuador's Indigenous peoples, with whom the Communist and Socialist parties had begun to initiate

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<sup>17</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> "Juventud del Ecuador os Hablo Roosevelt," *Antinazi* 10, September 20, 1942, 1.

<sup>19</sup> "Exposiciones pictóricas Eduardo Kingman y su arte popular," *Antinazi* 2, March 27, 1942, 4.

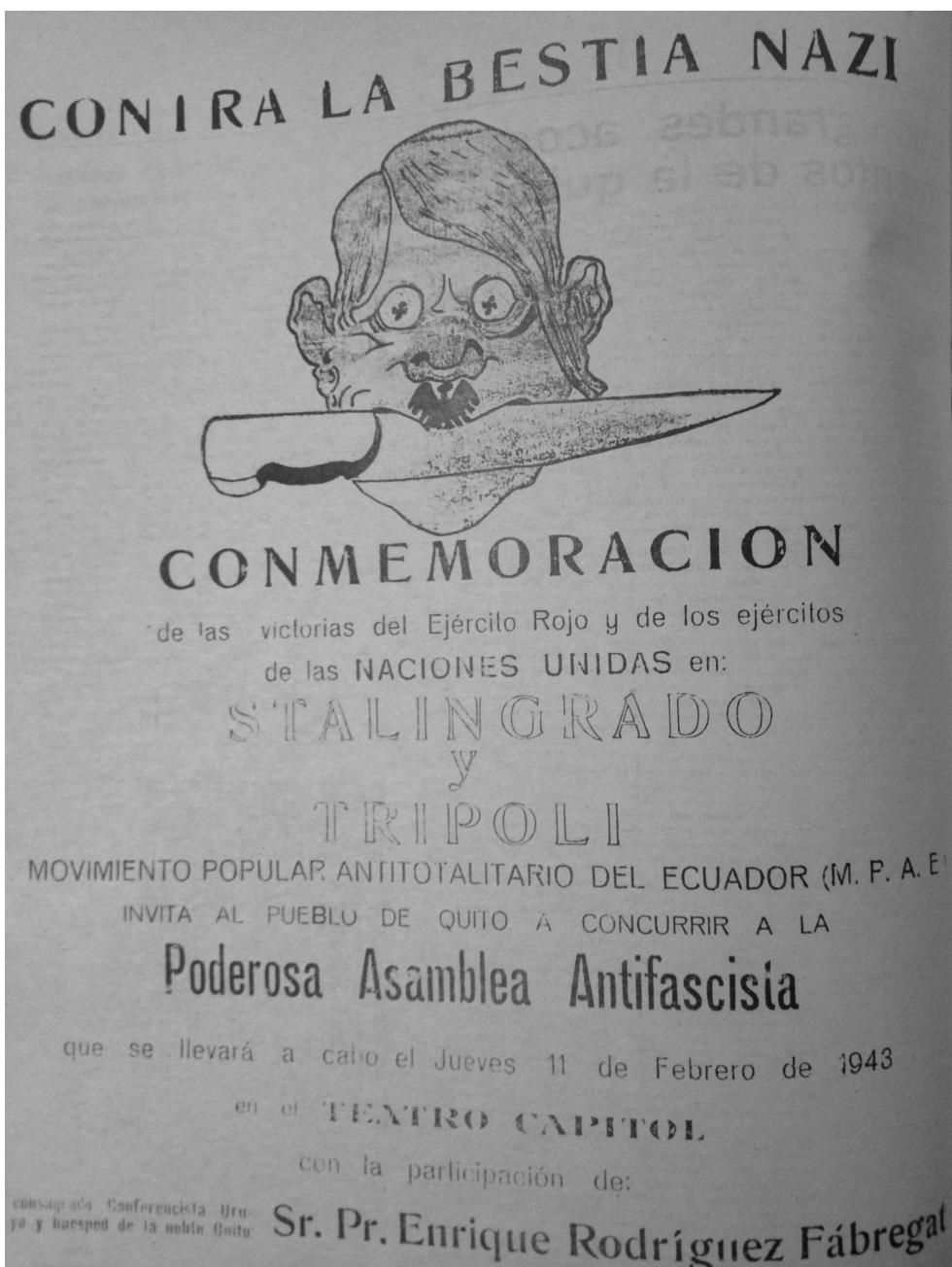
contact. Part of the Communist agenda for Ecuador meant the integration of Indigenous groups as citizens of the state with full labor and agrarian rights. Using Kingman's Indigenous paintings as a platform, MPAE fostered discussions about the plight of Ecuador's Indigenous population and the evils of Nazism's race theories. Members of MPAE could justify the support of Ecuador's Indigenous movement as a means of defending the country from fascist activity. With exhibitions of Eduardo Kingman's works, antifascists critiqued the inequality in the country and brought attention to the desperate need for reform. Later, Indigenous groups themselves utilized antifascism as a means of asserting themselves in Ecuador's national political discourse.<sup>20</sup>

MPAE held numerous assemblies after its founding to help promote domestic antifascism and the growth of the labor movement. In the Provincial Conference of Pichincha held on September 20-27, 1943, antifascists debated issues of Ecuadorian sovereignty, the exploitation of labor, and territorial loss. They also expressed hope for the organizing power of the working classes and *campesinos*. Unions and communes were identified as the means to power, and MPAE promised to defend working-class economic interests.<sup>21</sup> Since Hitler's Nazi Party relied on the suppression of organized labor to thrive, Latin American Communists and leftists like Nela Martínez and Raymond Mériquet argued that a powerful labor movement prevented the growth of fascism. Raymond Mériquet communicated personally with labor groups such as the *Sociedad Artística e Industrial de Pichincha* (Artistic and Industrial Society of Pichincha), reminding them the importance of working-class support of antifascism and expressing

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<sup>20</sup> More on Indigenous organizations, movements, and their relationship with antifascism will be discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> Mériquet, *Bestia*, 18-29.



MPAE Propaganda, Quito, 1943, leaflet, in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 194.



solidarity with their goals of labor reform.<sup>22</sup> MPAE hosted the Mexican labor leader Vincente Lombardo Toledano in October of 1942, while *Antinazi* reprimanded the Archbishop of Quito, Carlos María de la Torre, for his sermons attacking Communism and urging Catholic laborers not to attend or participate in the 1943 Worker's Congress.<sup>23</sup> In mutual faith, union and labor leaders attended MPAE's events and spoke at rallies and assemblies.<sup>24</sup> The *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Madera* (Wood Worker's Union) and the *Sindicato de Operarios de Zapatería* (Shoe Operators Union) signed and endorsed MPAE's acts, homages, and expressions of solidarity with Allied nations.

Franklin Perez Castro, one of Guayaquil's antifascist leaders, recalled the uniquely domestic focus of Ecuador's movement. In an interview, Castro stated:

Elsewhere the antifascist movements were more theoretical, explained in a rather romantic, idealistic manner...What we had here was a kind of popular instinct to collect the anguish of the people and expose it, but in exchange, imagine that such claims, the distinctive features of the workers, had been strongly brought out and that exploitation of the oligarchic classes and imperialism which work against our country and against the workers of every country had been unmasked...Then the workers would have actually participated harder and with more force in the anti-fascist movement: but otherwise, declamations and theorizing were hard to incorporate in this fight...You could only bring them into this fight by showing them that the antifascist position was a struggle for the good of the people and the country: for the defense of their sovereignty, their rights, of the national economy...It was of the masses (*Era de masas*).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Mériguet to President of Artistic Society, October 29, 1941 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 7.

<sup>23</sup> "El Congreso Obrero y el Clero Católica," *Antinazi* 17, Feb. 28, 1943, 2; "Homenaje a Francia Libre y a su heroica pueblo," July 14, 1942 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 80; "Lombardo Toledano al M.P.A.E.," *Antinazi* 10, Sept. 20, 1942, 2.

<sup>24</sup> "De la última manifestación antitotalitaria," *La Defensa*, July 3, 1942.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin Perez Castro and Jaime Galarza Zavala, *Así Fue El 28 De Mayo: Conversaciones Con Jaime Galarza Zavala* (Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1990), 10-11.

By focusing on domestic issues and sacrificing theory, Castro states that Ecuadorian antifascists gained followers to their movement. According to him, foreign forms of antifascism, with the supposed emphasis on theoretical models, proved impractical in Ecuador. Instead, antifascists and leftists in Ecuador translated antifascism to address the country's quotidian difficulties. Instead of solely focusing on raising anti-Nazi sentiment, MPAE heavily emphasized social projects and assemblies. As a result, the antifascist movement became more entrenched in the country's own politics, leading to a stronger relationship with the growing movement against Carlos Arroyo del Río.

### **Alliance with Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (ADE)**

As the 1940s progressed, the antifascist movement began associating with the movement to overthrow the Liberal government in the next presidential elections. Initially, members of MPAE and other antifascists had even supported Arroyo del Río for his hard stance against the Axis powers and for breaking relations with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Nonetheless, the relations between the antifascist movement and the government of Carlos Arroyo del Río became strained as time went on.

In 1943, as a result of the unpopularity of Carlos Arroyo del Río's regime, members of the Communist Party, students, women's groups, the Conservative Party and independent Liberals formed the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Democratic Alliance of Ecuador), a coalition dedicated to the election of José María Velasco Ibarra as president.<sup>26</sup> The program of the ADE included: the establishment of a real democracy

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<sup>26</sup> On its executive committee, Mariano Suárez Veintimilla represented the Conservative Party, Camilo Ponce Enríquez and José Rafael Terán R. represented the Democratic Front (the student bloc), Hugo Carrera Andrade and Gonzalo Maldonado Enríquez acted for the Independent Radical-Liberals, Eduardo Ludeña and Gustavo Buendía spoke on behalf of the Revolutionary Vanguard (a leftist group), and Gustavo Becerra and César Endara appeared for the Communist Party; "Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana,"

based on popular support expressed through suffrage; the reorganization of the economy to adapt to the circumstances of World War II and provide protections to laborers; the elevation of the economic and moral standing of the working classes in Ecuador through means such as a living wage and control of market prices; the intensification of education, especially children's education, both urban and rural; the technical instruction and moralization of the armed forces; the strengthening of the international image of Ecuador; support for the international defense of democracy and the repression of all Nazi-Fascist activity.<sup>27</sup> Both movements agreed on a number of major issues beyond the prevention of Nazi-Fascism and the defense of democracy. Both ADE and MPAE desired the reintegration of Ecuador's lost lands from of the 1941 War with Peru, the revision of the subsequent Rio Protocol, and an end to electoral fraud. MPAE's agreement with these issues reveals a deeper involvement with Ecuador's domestic issues than simply promoting the cause of antifascism. By enmeshing itself in Ecuadorian concerns, MPAE served as a political force of domestic reform.

ADE and MPAE collaborated on a number of events, such as the large provincial antifascist assembly of September 20-27, 1943 in Quito, where MPAE hosted a lecture by the ADE delegate Isaac Santos.<sup>28</sup> The propaganda spread by MPAE raised anxiety and awareness of Nazi Germany and the growth of generic fascism, but also argued that if Ecuadorians ever wanted their lands back from the 1941 war with Peru, they would need

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February 25, 1944, doc. 137, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>27</sup> "Puntos Programaticos de Alianza Democratica Ecuatoriana," 1940-1944, doc. 1057, Documentos Politicos, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>28</sup> "Conferencia Provincial anti-fascista se inaugurará hoy en la Universidad Cenral con un acto solemne," *El Dia*, Quito, September 20, 1943.

to declare war on the Axis.<sup>29</sup> Targeting a patriotic cause (Ecuador's land disputes) and linking it to the global fight against fascism gave MPAE political clout and appealed to the anti-Peruvian sentiment permeating throughout the country. According to Raymond Mériquet, the antifascist movement emerged from the lack of international and governmental concern over the Ecuador-Peruvian War. In his 1943 publication *Contra la Bestia Nazi* (Against the Nazi Beast), Mériquet stated that MPAE partly arose from the treaty with Peru, the continental debilitation caused by the fascists in Peru, and the loss of Ecuador's immense and valuable lands. Since the end of World War II also promised an end to fascism, the reintegration of Ecuadorian territories could be negotiated in post-war compromise if Ecuador declared war on the Axis. MPAE fused anti-Peruvian and anti-Axis sentiment into a single antifascist cause. And since Arroyo del Río had failed to arm the populace in the 1941 war, had yet to declare war on the Axis, and only seemed to be repressing the people, his removal became increasingly justified over time.<sup>30</sup>

When both countries agreed upon a ceasefire in January, the United States, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil became guarantors of the peace treaty, known as the 1941 Rio Protocol, which ceded most of the disputed territory to Peru. During the 1943-1944 presidential campaign, ADE and MPAE placed the blame for Ecuador's territorial loss squarely on President Carlos Arroyo del Río. Opponents to his regime argued that Carlos Arroyo del Río had failed to make Ecuador a combatant in the war. Instead, Ecuador was

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<sup>29</sup> Manuel Agustín Aguirre, "Manifiesto del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano a la Nación," August 8, 1942, doc. 7, Hojas Volantes, 1940-1980, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polít, Quito, Ecuador; "El Ecuador debe declarar la guerra al Eje," *Antinazi* 20, May 24, 1943 3; "El Nazifascismo y la Clase Obrera del Ecuador," *Antinazi* 2, March 27, 1942, 6; "En Marcha Pueblo Ecuatoriano a Destruir a la Bestia Nazi," flyer, December 5, 1942 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériquet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 155.

<sup>30</sup> Mériquet, "Nota," *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériquet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), iv-v; Mériquet, *Bestia*, 19; Martínez, *Siempre*, 79.

only a mere passive recipient of Peru's fascist aggression. Furthermore, after the signing of the Rio Protocol, Ecuador, in their eyes, had become a martyr for hemispheric unity in the face of World War II. Ecuadorian news outlets, specifically the conservative *El Comercio*, commented that Ecuador's "generous heart" made it unable to fight or support a war, and that the patriotism of its men and women stemmed from a natural selflessness in the nation.<sup>31</sup> After the signing of the Rio Protocol in January of 1942, the newspaper emphasized the idea that Pan-American solidarity hurt Ecuador like no other nation, and its territory was lost as part of the global fight against fascism.<sup>32</sup>

Framing Ecuador as a martyr to Pan-Americanism became useful in the defense of its territorial claims to the international community. Furthermore, it integrated Ecuador as a member of the Allied united front. Although the war was lost, Ecuadorians could hope that the reconstruction of democratic countries after World War II would extend to the boundaries between Ecuador and Peru. But Ecuadorians also developed a level of contempt for US intervention in the Rio Protocol. Critics of the Protocol argued that US imperialists had forced Ecuador to sign. Additionally, the Communist Nela Martinez noted that the United States dominated the Rio Conference and exercised complete control over the border agreements.<sup>33</sup> Carlos Arroyo del Río's acquiescence to the United

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<sup>31</sup> "Asamblea popular anti-fascista se celebró anoche en la Casa del Obrero," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 31, 1942;

"El espíritu patriótica vibra indignado por la incalificable agresión peruana," *El Comercio*, Quito, July 7, 1941; "El Ecuador no quiere la guerra porque tiene un corazón magnánimo y generoso," *El Comercio*, Quito, July 21, 1941.

<sup>32</sup> "La firma del acuerdo con Perú ha sido para el Ecuador un inmenso sacrificio," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 30, 1942; "En medio del sacrificio de sus derechos, Ecuador ha querido dar prueba de cooperación para unidad de América," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 31, 1942; "Al mantenimiento de la solidaridad de América la ha hecho el Ecuador una ofrenda de su derecho," *El Comercio*, Quito, Feb 20, 1942; Meriguet, *Contra*, 27; "Acuerdo que fija definitivamente la frontera entre el Ecuador y el Perú," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 10, 1944.

<sup>33</sup> "En Washington se espera que Ecuador y Perú hallen fórmula de solución final de su litigio," *El Comercio*, Quito, July 27, 1941; "La expulsión de los agentes del Eje constituye una importante medida

States and his lack of action in the Peruvian war earned him the hatred of his people, and the memory of his weakness continued long after his overthrow.

### Gender and ADE

An under-researched aspect of ADE, the gendered composition of its members can bring to light new aspects to the coalition. As Nela Martinez later commented, “[n]obody has stopped to analyze the depths of these events. Not only was the dissatisfaction of the people due to the repression unleashed by the government of Arroyo del Río and the rejection of the signing of the Rio Protocol...but for the first time with so much momentum, there was a far-reaching female (*femenina*) presence.”<sup>34</sup> Although other scholars have noted the failures of the May Revolution of 1944, a gendered approach highlights the fundamental flaws and disparities within the movement that *preceded* the revolution, and subsequently *proceeded* to break down the revolution’s alliances in the aftermath. ADE and MPAE brought together both men and women with a united goal of reconstructing the country and removing the Liberal Party. Women like Nela Martinez heavily participated in the development of the antifascist movement in order to broaden democracy and gain key political rights. Later, the women’s group *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women’s Alliance) became a partner and co-sponsor of antifascist rallies to reform democracy in Ecuador.<sup>35</sup> In observing the role of women in ADE and MPAE, the composition of the alliance can be seen as

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para aumentar seguridades de países de América” and “Los Ecuatorianos han puesto sus esperanzas en la Conferencia de Río,” *El Comercio*, Quito, January 19, 1942; Macario Gutierrez Solorzano, “La Revolución del 28 de Mayo en Manabí,” in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 189; Nela Martinez, Prologo, *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguét Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), i-iii.

<sup>34</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 94-95.

<sup>35</sup> Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana was a women’s group founded in 1938 by the Communist militant Nela Martínez, with the goal of advancing women’s political rights. It will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

tenuous and given to fracturing among the various groups. While the ideals of ADE, compounded with antifascism, served to unite the diverse factions, the eventual breakdown of the alliance is apparent early on in the accounts of female leftists like Nela Martinez, who were accustomed to weak alliances with larger movements and political parties. In a letter to Ricardo Paredes, Martínez noted the subversive political maneuvering of Conservatives and Liberals in ADE. While the left had presented a united front and supported Velasco Ibarra, Liberals and Conservatives remained suspect, and Nela Martinez, as early as 1943, expressed her own personal doubts about the sustainability of ADE.<sup>36</sup> After May 28, leftists would regret joining ADE and supporting Velasco Ibarra.

On the other hand, gender dynamics among men and women drastically changed upon participating in ADE. Antifascism provided the opportunity for women to advance political and personal aims, while ADE became an empowering experience for women as they organized alongside men. For example, besides being a founding member of MPAE, Nela Martinez represented the Communist Party at the *Comite Central Electoral Pro Dr. Jose Velasco Ibarra* (Central Electoral Committee “Pro Velasco Ibarra”) and aided in its planning for Velasco’s presidential election.<sup>37</sup> Other women, such as Isabel Herreria and Ana Moreno, joined ADE and “would later become combatants in the labor (*jornadas*) of the revolution on May 28 and 29 of 1944, in Guayaquil and Quito, as part of the

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<sup>36</sup> Nela Martinez to Ricardo Paredes, February 23, 1944, Cartas 151-180, C-0164, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador; “Hoy Lunes 20 de Septiembre a las 6 y 15 P.M.,” flyer, September 20, 1943 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 268; “La Conferencia Provincial Antifascista se Inauguro ayer en la Universidad Central,” *El Dia*, Quito, September 24, 1943.

<sup>37</sup> “Comision Organizadora Pro Dr. Jose Velasco Ibarra,” August 30, 1943, Letter template, doc. 1074, Documentos Politicos, Archivo Martínez-Mériguet, Quito, Ecuador.

anonymous mass.”<sup>38</sup> Women in AFE, MP AE, and ADE inserted themselves into the political openings that anti-Arroyo sentiment and antifascism provided. The accounts of Isabel Herreria and Ana Moreno, members of both AFE and ADE, reveal the gender-neutral space where men and women could come together. ADE gave men and women a shared cause and did not allocate or divide work based on gender. As a result, women experienced a sense of power upon engaging in ADE campaigns. “We all felt like peers (*compañeros*), comrades (*comaradas*),” stated Herreria and Moreno, “united in a single cause. And it was not only the hatred of Arroyo, but also, above all, the hope for what would come afterward.”<sup>39</sup> As the antifascist movement developed alongside ADE, political spaces opened up for women to become partners in nation building. Moreno and Herreria went on to state, “Many authentic revolutionaries were in our ranks. Men and women born in the heart of the people (*pueblo*)...who lost, for the first time, their fear to express their thoughts. They became leaders. They talked of the land, crops, of injustice, their sons and diseases...”<sup>40</sup> Through ADE, as with AFE and MP AE, women’s voices entered the sphere of political dialogue.

### **Anti-imperialism and Ideals of Democracy**

As the Allied forces planted the ideals of democracy throughout the world, their propaganda influenced the way in which Ecuadorians understood what constituted a democracy at home. It also resulted in mixed reactions to the role of Ecuador in World War II. For leftist Ecuadorians and enemies of the Liberal Party, the fight against fascism

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<sup>38</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 94.

<sup>39</sup> Isabel Herreria and Ana Moreno, “El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana,” in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 239

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



and WWII meant an end to corrupt democracy and US imperialism. However, the immense level of US influence and electoral fraud throughout Latin America had become almost impossible to curb. Progressive Ecuadorians argued that the Atlantic Charter and Rio Protocol were examples of the passive role Ecuador played in the international defense of democracy. To them, Pan-American solidarity required Ecuadorian compliance. Socialists argued that Pan-Americanism only served as a cover for the traditional ‘dollar diplomacy’ and ‘good neighbor’ policies of the United States, pressuring small countries like Ecuador into submission. From leasing the Galapagos Islands to the United States for naval bases to supplying raw goods to American troops, the country played an obedient role in hemispheric unity.<sup>41</sup> Despite its detrimental effects, Ecuadorian leftists, antifascists, and anti-Arroyo leaders accepted the influence of the United States to a certain extent since hemispheric unity could prove useful in expanding political rights at home.

Beyond the failures against Peru, Liberal policies were viewed by Ecuadorian activists as means of selling the country to foreign capital by privileging a free market and export industry. While the original purpose of the Atlantic Charter was to solidify the alliances of American states and protect small countries like Ecuador, it became an object of abuse by foreign capital and the US military. In addition, MPAE argued that the Monroe Doctrine had become a tool for US imperialism in Latin America.<sup>42</sup> Ecuadorians asserted that the 1941 Ecuadorian-Peruvian War arose due to the rivalry between

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<sup>41</sup> “Oficiales y Soldados Japoneses Secundan la Agresion Peruana a Nuestros Destacamentos,” *El Comercio*, Quito, July 25, 1941; “Ecuador ha cooperado para la defensa continental permitiendo que EE.UU establezca una base naval en Salinas,” *El Comercio*, Quito, March 3, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> “La Carta del Atlántico,” *Antinazi* 22, July 10, 1943, 3; “El Verdadero Sentido de la Doctrina Monroe,” *Antinazi* 24, August 17, 1943, 1.

Standard Oil, an American company, and the foreign-owned Royal Dutch Shell. Thus, Ecuador's territorial reduction was due to the oil interests of the United States. It was not a coincidence that most of the territory Ecuador lost had been previously leased to Shell.<sup>43</sup> Ecuadorians wanted to shake off the yoke of Yankee imperialism, arguing that their neighbor in the North overrode the sovereignty of the nation. In the eyes of leftists and antifascists, Liberal politicians had sold the country to imperialists, and it was up to Ecuadorians to regain it.<sup>44</sup> Communists rigorously denounced Arroyo del Río as a friend of foreign capital. They argued that the capitalist free market damaged Ecuador's economy and led to greater disparities in wealth. As a result, Ecuadorian industry remained underdeveloped, immersing the population in extreme poverty.<sup>45</sup> The Liberal government, whose stronghold in Guayaquil was attached to the rich banking elites of the coast, had betrayed the country in favor of foreign capital, leading Ricardo Paredes to call Carlos Arroyo del Río the "Apostle of Skyscraper capitalism" in a letter to Nela Martinez.<sup>46</sup>

In the midst of Liberal Party repression and World War II, the lines between antifascism, anti-Arroyo sentiment, and anti-imperialism began to blur. Still, antifascists did not see the contradictions in siding with the US against Nazism and Italian Fascism, yet criticizing the role of the US in overpowering Ecuadorian sovereignty. By the mid-

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<sup>43</sup> Ketty Leroux, *El Movimiento de Mujeres en el Ecuador* (Guayaquil: Universidad de Guayaquil, 1997), 160-161; Nela Martinez, "A Los 20 Anos de la Gloriosa," in *Insumisas, Textos Sobre las Mujeres: Nela Martínez Espinosa*, ed. Rosemarie Terán Najas (Quito: M&M Impresiones), 59-60.

<sup>44</sup> Pedro Jorge Vera, "La Insurrección del 28 de Mayo: Un vistazo," Jorge Alberto Pólit Ortiz, "Antecedentes y recuerdos de la Revolución del 28 de Mayo de 1944," and Francisco Pólit Ortiz, "A los 40 años de la 'Gloriosa Revolución' del 28 de Mayo de 1944," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 31-39, 49, 88.

<sup>45</sup> "Que se libere de derechos a la importación de trigo y se prohíba la de harinas," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 14, 1944.

<sup>46</sup> Ricardo Paredes to Nela Martinez, May 5, 1943, Cartas 61-90, C-0069, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

1940s, the mixed reactions of Ecuadorians to US influence resulted in a stand against their most accessible enemies: the Liberal Party and Carlos Arroyo del Río. Antifascism, in the Ecuadorian context, blended well enough with domestic concerns that a revolution, which blended hopes of democratic, economic and territorial revival, would emerge.

The anti-Arroyo movement of ADE attached democratic values to their participation in the global antifascist movement during World War II. Democracy, as defined by Ecuadorians, would eliminate electoral fraud and despotic regimes. It meant fair elections and popular suffrage. Therefore, the defense of democracy through antifascism became the means of ensuring clean elections. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, fraudulent elections were not only the norm, but expected in Latin American politics. To his enemies, the election of Carlos Arroyo del Río's meant the continued electoral fraud of the Liberal Party. Carlos Arroyo del Río assured he would follow the ideals of Liberal doctrine, promised stability, and hoped for peace. But the Manifesto of the Coastal Committee "October 9th" (*Comite Costeno "Nueve de Octubre"*), a Liberal group, reveals the true intentions of most coastal elites who controlled the government: only Liberals and Carlos Arroyo del Río were equipped to lead, the focus of the country needed to be raw exportation, and the incorporation of Indigenous groups into the politics of Ecuador stalled progress for the nation. For women, Indigenous groups, and leftists, Arroyo's election represented the antithesis of democracy, and antifascism provided the rhetoric to justify his removal.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "La Contienda Electoral," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 4, 1940; "El Primer Dia de Elecciones Favorecio al Dr. Carlos Arroyo del Río," "El Dr. Velasco Ibarra Triunfa Ampliamente en el Primer Dia de Elecciones de Ésta Ciudad," and "Dentro de un Ambiente de Excitacion se iniciaron las elecciones en Guayaquil," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 11, 1940; "Incidentes en las Elecciones de ayer en Guayaquil," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 12, 1940; "Amplios detalles del connato revolucionario de Guayaquil," *El Comercio*, Quito,

By the 1940s, as labor groups, Indigenous groups, women and leftists demanded the right to participate in formal politics, the idea of a rigged election could no longer be defended, especially in the face of a global war against authoritarianism. Members of MPAE and ADE pushed for clean elections as the means of obtaining a democracy. Others desired to end electoral fraud, especially after the results of 1940 presidential elections, and feared a similar outcome for the 1944 elections.<sup>48</sup> As the scholar Silvia Vega Ugalde has noted, universal suffrage, in the context of 1940's Ecuador, did not mean voting rights for all Ecuadorians (i.e. Indigenous groups). Instead, it meant an end to government intervention in elections, and the freedom for political parties to organize and campaign without censorship.<sup>49</sup> In his 1943-1944 presidential campaign, Velasco Ibarra consistently promised this form of universal suffrage, and championed it as the only true form of democracy. Members of ADE argued that the Liberal government impeded universal suffrage in Ecuador. Liberals, in fact, destroyed the liberty of suffrage with their use of electoral fraud.<sup>50</sup> In his charged letter, Velasco Ibarra attacked Carlos Arroyo del Río for disregarding popular suffrage, stating:

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January 13, 1940; "El Dr. Velasco Ibarra fue traído en avión a esta ciudad junto con otros detenidos," *El Comercio*, Quito, January 14, 1940; Carlos Arroyo del Río, *Mensaje del Excmo. Señor Presidente Constitucional de la República Doctor Don. Carlos Arroyo del Río* (Quito: Imprenta del Ministerio de Gobierno, 1940).

<sup>48</sup> Jose Santos Rodriguez, "Aspectos fundamentales de la Constitución de 1945," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 163-180.

<sup>49</sup> Silvia Vega Ugalde, *La Gloriosa: de la revolución del 28 de mayo de 1944 a la contrarrevolución velasquista* (Colección Ecuador/Historia, Quito: Editorial El Conejo, 1987), 56.

<sup>50</sup> El Comité Central Pro Reconstrucción Nacional, "El Velasquismo Rechaza la Interpretación del Ejecutivo Acerca de Inscripciones," December 26, 1940, leaflet, doc. 202, Hojas Volantes 1933-1939, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador; José María Velasco Ibarra, *Mensaje del Excmo. Señor Presidente de la República Dr. José María Velasco Ibarra a la Honorable Asamblea Constituyente de 1944* (Quito: Imprenta Nacional, 1944), 4.

Comité Central Conservador Pro Velasco Ibarra, "Por qué nuestro voto será por el Candidato Popular," May 2, 1944, leaflet, doc. 34, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador.

It is not possible to call you President of the Republic of Ecuador. Political Constitutions are given for a purpose in free countries. The President of the Republic of Ecuador is a magistrate, Chief of the Executive branch of the government, and elected by direct suffrage by a sovereign people...The crowds of Ibarra, Ambato, Riobamba, Guayaquil, and all of Ecuador expressed in formidable masses their hatred of you. You grabbed power through the action of challenging material forces. You are not, therefore, the President of Ecuador, if any seriousness is to be given to words. You are a dictator...<sup>51</sup>

As Velasco Ibarra's letter highlights, Arroyo del Río's despotism, seizure of power and denial of popular suffrage delegitimized his presidency. He and his followers asserted that Liberal politics showed signs of a dictatorship, which Ecuadorians could not tolerate by the 1940s. Arguing for fraud-free elections and expanding suffrage only aided Velasco Ibarra's election since his populist style relied on the votes of the masses. Furthermore, it placed Ecuadorian elections on par with those of other nations defending democracy during World War II, namely the United States. As transnational ideas of democracy took hold in Ecuador, leaders of the anti-Arroyo and antifascist movements utilized them as a justification for his overthrow.

## **Conclusion**

The antifascist movement in Ecuador took its own unique shape due to the region's domestic issues, such as the war with Peru and the Rio Protocol. Sprouting from the leftist grievances against *bonifascismo* and the labor of *Comite "Mingas Populares,"* the antifascist movement flourished in Ecuador under Raymond Mériquet's guidance. Representative of the movement's transnationalism, a French expatriate successfully launched the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador*. Although focused on the spread of fascism, MPAE concurrently addressed Ecuador's economic and social issues,

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<sup>51</sup> José María Velasco Ibarra, "You Are Not My President," August 2, 1941 in *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Carlos De La Torre and Steve Striffler (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 163.

and began affiliating with *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana*, a coalition of Ecuadorian opposition to the Liberal government.

Antifascism helped to build the alliances that would be so crucial in the May Revolution of 1944. By the outbreak of the revolution, the removal of Carlos Arroyo del Río had become the prime focus of members of MPAE and ADE. Men and women from the left and right critiqued Arroyo's foreign policies, especially his acquiescence to US influence, the loss of the 1941 Ecuadorian-Peruvian War, his failure to arm the populace, his agreement to the Rio Protocol, and his use of electoral fraud. It was both displeasure with Carlos Arroyo del Río and the entire Liberal Party that elicited calls of widening democracy. World War II promised an end to fascism, and Latin Americans utilized the Allies' message of democracy to expand political rights, redefine citizenship, and incorporate diverse voices into the body politic. In the case of Ecuador, a revolution, instead of reform, was the tool used by ADE and MPAE to place their country on the road to democracy. It was also the only ideology that had ability to bring together Communists and Conservatives under a single goal. Finally, antifascism also gave opportunities for women and Indigenous groups to enter into national political discourse. Utilizing antifascism, women heavily engaged in Ecuador's domestic issues in order to demonstrate their crucial role in the country's future.

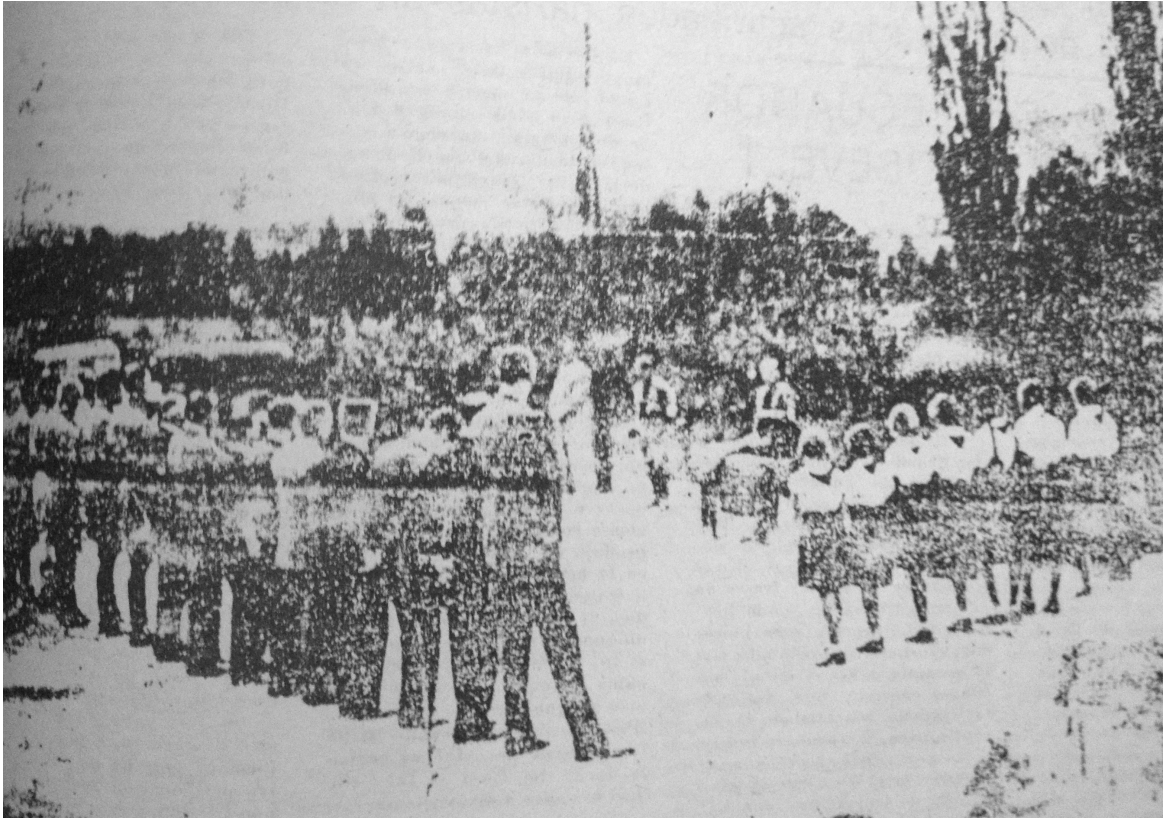
## **Chapter 2:** **Women on the Front Lines: Nela Martínez and the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana***

In September of 1942, photos of alleged Nazi activity at the *Casa Alemana* in Quito appeared in the pages of *La Defensa*. In its comments, the Catholic labor newspaper stated that, “[t]he presence of women and youth in the photo speaks very clearly to the important role that both women and youth play in the structure of the National Socialist Party and in contemporary Germany.”<sup>1</sup> What *La Defensa* failed to mention was the importance of women in the antifascist movement. The women’s branch, *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women’s Alliance), worked in conjunction with Raymond Meriguet’s *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* (MPAE; Popular Anti-totalitarian Movement of Ecuador). However, AFE was not solely dedicated to antifascism. Rather, its primary and founding principle was the political advancement of women. AFE utilized antifascism in conjunction with independent service projects, and adapted antifascist ideology in order to expand democracy for women in Ecuador. As the 1943-1944 movement to remove the Liberal president Carlos Arroyo del Río progressed and intersected with the antifascist movement, culminating in the May Revolution of 1944, women of AFE like Nela Martínez became key players, injecting their voices into national political discourse by utilizing antifascism in an effort to redefine citizenship.

Antifascism and the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE) have been overlooked in the discussion of the May Revolution of 1944, yet both fundamentally affected its development and success. Recreating a history of the women’s group from disparate

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<sup>1</sup> “Tropas de Asalto en Nuestra Capital,” *La Defensa*, Quito, September 8, 1942, 1-2 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 120.



Unidentified photographer, Women and Children in Casa Alemana, Quito, 1942, photo, in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 123.

materials remains a vital need in the study of Ecuadorian history, and by examining the origins and tenets of AFE, one can arrive at a new understanding of Ecuadorian engagement with international ideologies and the ability of antifascism to hold together new alliances of men and women on the eve of the May Revolution of 1944.

AFE, much like MP AE, brought together a diverse group of women from all social strata, racial groups, and political ideologies and also emerged from the disorder and upheavals of the 1930s with careful guidance from its leader, Nela Martínez. The group revolutionized the definition of a women's organization by focusing on political and labor reform, citizenship, antifascism, poverty relief, and Indigenous rights.

Furthermore, Nela Martínez translated global developments, such as the Popular Front,



into domestic programs as means of organically developing a stronger women's movement in Ecuador.

### **Founding of AFE**

*Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* was founded in Quito by the militant Communists, Mariana de Jesús Martínez Espinosa (Nela for short) and Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre, in 1938.<sup>2</sup> AFE marked the beginning of a new type of women's organization in Ecuador. Members of AFE included political reformers, labor leaders, and prominent members of the Communist Party, the Indigenous movement, and the Liberal Party.<sup>3</sup> Through AFE, Nela Martínez and Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre hoped to address the difficulties women faced in Ecuador. Entrenched in the workforce, women were paid significantly less than men, had fewer work options, and faced discrimination and harassment. Furthermore, while the Liberal-dominated Congress had approved new amendments to the Civil Code, which legalized divorce, the secularization of marriage resulted in an uneven distribution of legal power. Divorce proceedings usually favored men, who could more easily divorce women without the intervention of the Church,

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<sup>2</sup> Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 93-94; *Siempre* is a published oral memoir of Nela Martínez. She speaks of her early life, the development of AFE, and the role it played in the May Revolution, but the work has been under-analyzed by scholars. It serves as the foundation for this chapter, augmented with personal papers and documents, letters, and newspapers columns on AFE. For more information on Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre, see: Raquel Rodas, *Nosotras que del amor hicimos* (Editorial Fraga, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Ketty Leroux, *El Movimiento de Mujeres en el Ecuador* (University of Guayaquil, 1997), 162-163; The exact date of AFE's foundation remains unclear. AFE members included: Isabel Herrería, Ana Moreno, Corina Hidalgo, Alba Calderón, Luisa Gomez de la Torre, Raquel Verdesoto de Romo, Matilde Nogales, Virginia Larenas, Zoila Ugarte de Landívar, Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante, Matilde Hidalgo de Procel, Nelly Cereceda, Dominga Holmes, María Julia Salazar, Gloria Baquerizo, Alicia Arévalo, Elfida Suárez, Rosita Castillo, Zoila de Novillo, Isabel de Cereceda, Lucrezia López, Carmen Obregón, Esther Rites, Digna Baidal, Felicia Brown, Zeneida Belcourt, Lucía Clavijo Peñaherrera, Julia Bastantes de Reyes, María Zaldumbide de Denis, Raquel Verdesoto de Romo Dávila, Mercedes Pacheco, Piedad Santana, Encarnación Alvarado, Dolores Cacuango, and its founder, Nela Martínez.



Unidentified photographer, Members of AFE, Quito, 1942, photo, in Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 97.

catalyzing a rise in single, working women.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Indigenous women remained on the margins of Ecuadorian society, facing the same land abuses and labor exploitation as their husbands, except without pay or labor rights. For all these reasons and more, *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* was born.<sup>5</sup>

The group did not initially take an antifascist stance, and between 1938 and 1941, it focused on women's obstacles in labor and politics. Later in the 1940s, as Ecuador

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<sup>4</sup> Teresa Meade, *A History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 98; Raquel R. Morales and Alexandra Quezada, *Historia del Voto Femenino en el Ecuador* (Quito, Ecuador: CONAMU, 2009), 119; "La Indisolubilidad del Matrimonio y El Divorcio," *El Hogar Cristiano* 1, Guayaquil, January 25, 1909, 2; "El Divorcio," *El Hogar Cristiano* 21, Guayaquil, October 25, 1910, 375.

<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive history of Ecuador's long history of racial discrimination, exploitation, and the activism of Indigenous groups, see: Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008); For more on women under the Liberal state, see: Ana María Goetschel, *Educación de las mujeres, maestras y esferas públicas: Quito en la primera mitad del siglo XX* (Quito: FLACSO - Sede Ecuador: Abya-Yala, 2007).

aligned more closely with the global shift against fascism, Nela Martínez and the women of AFE recognized the ability of antifascism to hold together a diverse alliance and give women an avenue to voice domestic concerns. Nela stated that the inspiration for AFE came from her experiences with women's organizations in Quito, noting that, "[i]n Quito I found right-wing and religious women's associations (*asociaciones femeninas*), but there did not exist an organization that gathered all the progressive, restless women of the left. So we began to form *Alianza Femenina*."<sup>6</sup>

AFE's founding principles consisted of:

1. Equality of economic, social and political rights, and the enforcement of existing laws
2. To demand special laws (*leyes especiales*) for women's education, both professional and domestic
3. The reform of labor laws, for equality in pay and performance
4. Special laws for female employees in private companies, small workshops, vendors, domestic workers, rope workers, etc.
5. Better hygiene practices in factories where women work and the defense of their health
6. The creation of dining rooms for women workers and the poor (*indigentes*)
7. The creation of daycares (*casacunas*)
8. Regulation of wet nurse (*nodrizas*) services
9. Women's intervention in the formation of laws that relate to them and children
10. Defense of women's civil and political positions
11. Revision of penal laws for women's crimes, aspiring to transform jails and correctional facilities to centers of work and re-education for women.<sup>7</sup>

The defense of women's civil rights, the advancement of their social and political positions, and their equal participation in the state can all be seen in the tenets of AFE. These women demanded gender-based affirmative action policies (*leyes especiales*) in order to rectify the systemic inequality imbedded in Ecuador's educational and political

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<sup>6</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> "Se Reunio Ayer la Asamblea de Mujeres Ecuatorianas (AFE)" *El Dia*, Quito, 1938 in *Orígenes del feminismo en el Ecuador*, ed. Ana María Goetschel (Quito: CONAMU, 2006), 182.

institutions, much like the purpose of modern day electoral gender quotas. In addition, demanding benefits for female laborers, tied to ideas of motherhood and aid, was intended to integrate women as equal players in the workforce. In factories and shops, women had historically been limited in terms of options and usually excluded from leadership in labor organizations. The founding tenets of AFE, hoping to combat these abuses, dictated the focus of their campaigns through the 1940s.

Many of AFE's activities were dedicated to overcoming men's opposition to equal labor rights. Both Catholic unions and leftist parties displayed sexist (*machista*) attitudes towards women in politics and the workforce. In July of 1938, Maria Piedad Santana wrote to Nela Martínez describing Raquel Verdezoto's and Virginia Larena's success in representing AFE at the nation's first Labor Congress. The women who attended had managed to gain the right to vote at the Congress despite heavy opposition by the male delegates. Santana's letter to Martínez thus illustrates the adversity women faced from outside of the labor movement, but especially from within it. Santana ends her letter with hopes for the establishment of more women's unions.<sup>8</sup> For many women in AFE like Santana, specifically gendered spaces could be a means of power within a larger labor or social movement since they opened the floor for women to contribute and participate without outside intervention or policing. AFE served its constituents as a women's organization, while women's unions could be a means of voicing concerns and achieve key victories in the labor movement without the antagonism of men.

AFE was comprised of a spectrum of political ideologies, so the group chose goals, tenets, and projects that did not alienate members of the right or left. "From the

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<sup>8</sup> Maria Piedad Santana to Nela Martínez, July 20, 1938, Cartas 211-232, C-0212, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

beginning,” Nela stated, “AFE supported struggles of a general social nature but without setting aside certain appropriate demands of women which were, by all lights, crucial (*eran a todas luces indispensables*); it organized and educated [in politics] a broad set of women from the country, in the cities and rural areas.”<sup>9</sup> By choosing “struggles of a general social nature” and ideologies such as antifascism, AFE could serve as a point of intersection where various political ideologies congregated and agreed on reform. It also acted as a bridge between urban and rural activists who historically did not come into contact with one another. Regardless of ideology, women in AFE agreed on the “equality of economic, social, and political rights for all Ecuadorians.”<sup>10</sup> Nela Martínez and Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre continued to be a part of the Communist Party, and Liberal women like Matilde Hidalgo de Procel, the pioneer of women’s suffrage in Ecuador, maintained their own ideologies, but AFE served as one of the spaces where diverse doctrines could be channeled toward a universal goal of women’s equality. “Letty apologizes for not being able to accompany us...She also believes it will not be possible to meet with the Supreme Chief,” wrote Matilde Hidalgo de Procel in a letter to Nela Martinez, “Tell me what we should do...A strong embrace until we meet again.”<sup>11</sup> Through AFE, new channels of communication were opened between women of diverse ideologies, and oftentimes even friendships could be formed. As Martínez stated, “one denominator in common united us all, and it was sensibility in the face of social issues.”<sup>12</sup> The purpose of AFE was to “educate women that in the past centuries they have been

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<sup>9</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>11</sup> Matilde Hidalgo de Procel to Nela Martínez, 1940, Cartas 211-232, C-0218, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador; For more on the life of Matilde Hidalgo de Procel, see: Jenny Estrada, *Una Mujer Total, Matilde Hidalgo De Prócel: Biografía* (Guayaquil: Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 95.

humiliated...so that they can, freely and spontaneously, incorporate themselves into the national community...We fight against discrimination based on sex, race, or class.”<sup>13</sup>

With the hopes of incorporating women into the body politic, AFE aimed its efforts at advancing rights through engagement with local politics, along with partaking in international concerns over war, Pan-Americanism, Nazism, Falangism, and Italian Fascism.

### **AFE Campaigns**

Members of *Alianza Femenina* institutionalized the group upon its founding in order to legitimize its activities vis-à-vis other contemporary organizations. Beyond an executive board and tenets, AFE members also carried membership cards, which summarized the group’s mission. They also paid membership dues for philanthropic activities and established branches of AFE throughout the country.<sup>14</sup> The founding principles of AFE manifested themselves in philanthropic activities, primarily illiteracy campaigns and poverty relief. The quotidian struggle of Ecuadorians provided an opportunity for AFE’s activists to lead campaigns for school children’s shoes, Indigenous education, women and children’s health, and daycare facilities for workers. Martínez noted that “our work was passionate, demanding, and rebellious; they allowed us to form the people politically and look for alternatives. That search for other outlets was, at once, an activity that allowed us to grow personally and always demand more.”<sup>15</sup> These acts, while providing aid, were also intrinsically political: through them, women gained vital socio-political capital and developed a sense of social justice.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Raquel Verdesoto, June 6, 1938, Cartas 211-232, C-0211, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>15</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 95-96.

AFE women also indirectly agreed on essentialist ideas of gender, rejecting other women's movements that espoused non-essentialist forms of feminism. Liberal, Indigenous, and even some Communist women in Ecuador, embraced, or at least utilized, traditional Latin American gender roles, particularly motherhood, as a form of power. "Among the Indigenous people," Nela Martinez stated of Dolores Cacuango, one of the most important leaders of the Indigenous movement and fellow member of AFE, "she was known as 'mother Federation'; partly because when Dolores became president [of the FEI; Ecuadorian Indigenous Federation], she was already called 'mama Dolores'. In a way, she had become the mother of all the Indigenous peoples and not just the president of the federation. Those are the advantages of motherhood."<sup>16</sup> In her role as a mother to the Indigenous people, Cacuango embodied a form of social motherhood that transcended her own biological motherhood.<sup>17</sup> Amy Lind's discussion of Ecuadorian styles of feminism grounds the use of femininity in Judith Butler's theory of "strategic essentialism" where, "certain political practices institute identities on a contingent basis in order to accomplish whatever aims are in view."<sup>18</sup> Essentialist notions of motherhood,

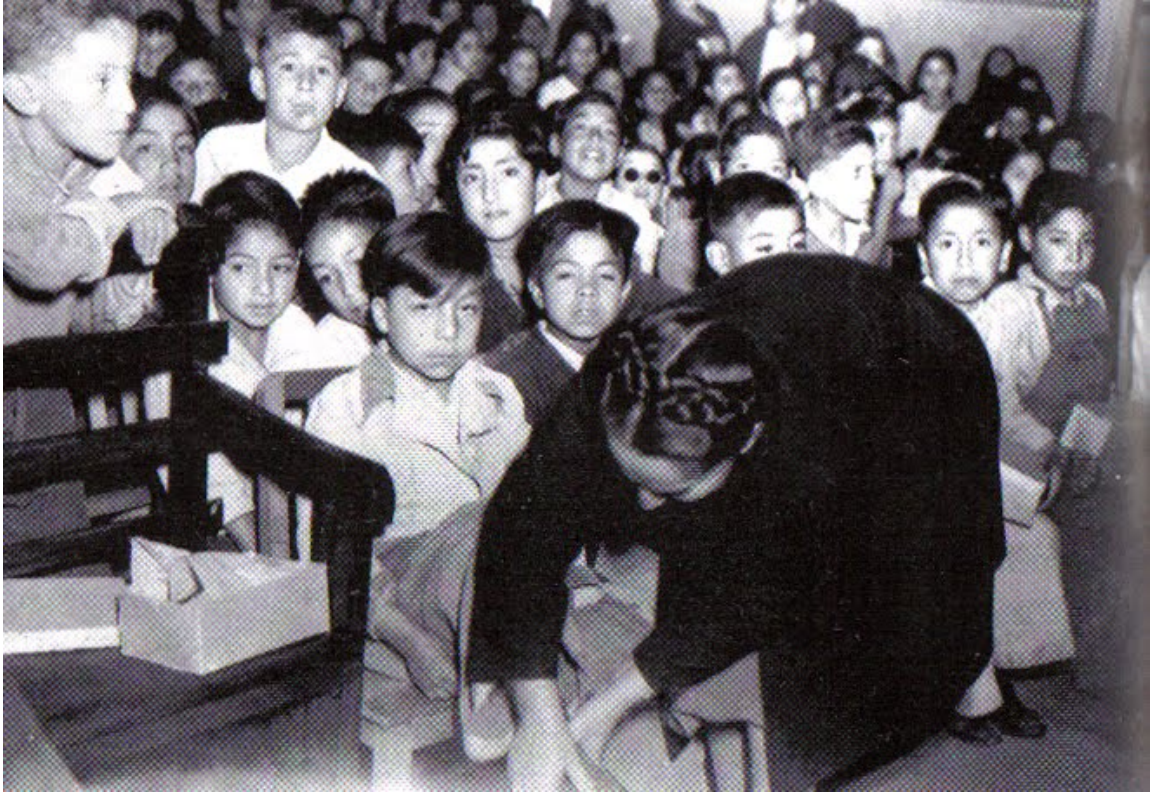
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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the concept of social motherhood and performativity, see: Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997); Marguerite Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994); Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16; Amy Lind, *Gendered Paradoxes: Women's Movements, State Restructuring, and Global Development in Ecuador* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2005), 10.





Unidentified photographer, Nela Martínez and the AFE Shoe Campaign, Quito, 1940s, photo, in Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 94.

as many Ecuadorian women understood it, provided a rhetoric for women to channel motherhood into tangible change. By placing themselves outside of the traditional political system and differentiating themselves from men, women could critique barriers to political participation yet retain their traditional roles.<sup>19</sup> It was a form of feminism that demanded equality precisely on the grounds of being a mother, not in spite of it. Even Dolores Cacuango and Nela Martínez, who were on the margins of this form of traditional, Catholic social missionary form of motherhood, still identified with its power. As Nela stated after the birth of her first child, “I cannot be in complete accordance with a certain type of radical feminism on the maternal instinct. On that first birth, and in the

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<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Gender*, 28.



birth of my other three children, I lived those pregnancies fully, with real intensity, and like many other women, none of the details of birth have faded from my memory. I think the desire to procreate prevails with all of its tenderness.”<sup>20</sup>

Transcending biological maternity and joining in a form of social motherhood, one of AFE’s largest campaigns (which would garner them national prestige) was providing shoes for school children.<sup>21</sup> This fairly uncontroversial campaign best embodied the tenets of AFE and served as the platform from which its members would launch their participation in the national discourse of reform. “Many of us were impacted by the general condition of the country,” stated Martínez, “but also the quotidian struggles of the cities, like for example, the large number of children without shoes who walked the streets of Quito and who then went to school like that. This explains our campaign for the collection of shoes.”<sup>22</sup> AFE members gathered donations from small businesses and large nonprofits like the Red Cross, acquiring vital fundraising skills. Furthermore, they converted their acts from simple charity to aiding future citizens of the state, arguing that their work quashed the growth of authoritarianism by means of education. In doing so, AFE demonstrated the necessity of women’s collaboration in the reconstruction of the country and preventing the spread of fascism. Finally, the distribution of shoes became large tools of propaganda for AFE as well. At one distribution, the National Conservatory played as women handed out shoes to lay and religious school children followed by a homage to mothers who lost their children in the

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<sup>20</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> The primary sources used in this chapter mostly date from 1945, although Nela stated AFE’s activities began before 1944. It is likely these activities were only reported on after 1944 once AFE had achieved national fame. Nonetheless, these sources can still be useful in order to see how these women interacted and engaged with Ecuadorian issues and how these acts transformed national political discourse over the role of women in society.

<sup>22</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 95.

1941 war with Peru. At another, Nela Martínez gave a speech on the need to awaken the consciousness of the lower classes, highlighting the use of daily realities to open the door for women to participate in domestic issues. These acts were not merely a reworking of antiquated gestures of philanthropy - they were platforms for AFE to begin a dialogue about inequality, wealth disparity, and women's contribution to the state.<sup>23</sup>

The goal of improving women's health led to discussions and assemblies dedicated to labor conditions, domestic health, and childcare. Matilde Hidalgo de Procel, the first female physician in the country, led the health and sanitation campaigns of AFE.<sup>24</sup> The group sponsored conferences on subjects such as tuberculosis prevention, and Matilde Hidalgo personally led courses on emergency care and nursing paid for and organized by AFE, which provided a form of free schooling to lower-class girls.<sup>25</sup> Under Nela Martínez's direction, AFE worked on alleviating the double standards and discrimination faced by women in the workforce. In 1943, Nela wrote under her pseudonym "Rosa Sol" in the magazine *Antinazi*, urging women workers to become more active in the labor movement and to follow the example of working women in the United States, United Kingdom, and China. Although World War II had opened opportunities for women, and the notion of opportunities for women in the workforce was taking hold

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<sup>23</sup> "Alianza Femenina Dara Zapatos a los Niños en Edad Escolar," *El Dia*, Quito, August 22, 1944; "Destina suma para proveer de calzado a niños pobres del 'Club Brethren,'" *El Comercio*, Quito, September 4, 1944; "Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana Debe Reunirse Hoy," *El Dia*, Quito, September 9, 1944; "Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana está alcanzando buen éxito a este fin," *El Dia*, Quito, October 1, 1944; "Labor Recomendable de Alianza Femenina," *El Dia*, Quito, March 20, 1945; "Reparto de Calzado Se Verifico Ayer a Escolares Pobres," *El Comercio*, Quito, March 25, 1945; "Obsequio de calzado a los niños pobres," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 28, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the health programs in Ecuador and the history of women in Ecuadorian medicine, see Kim Clark, *Gender, State, and Medicine in Highland Ecuador: Modernizing Women, Modernizing the State, 1895-1950* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> "Sobre la prevención de la tuberculosis en los hogares, habló el Dr. Valenzuela," *El Comercio*, Quito, November 23, 1944; "Alianza Femenina emprenderá en obras sociales y de beneficencia," *El Dia*, Quito, August 13, 1944; "Cursos de Enfermeras de Emergencia," *El Comercio*, Quito, August 25, 1944.

throughout the world, for whatever reason, Ecuadorian women were rejecting the global trend. Not one woman had registered for the country's next Worker's Congress. In an attempt to break down the idea that women's work was somehow lesser or temporary (and thus merited little participation in organized labor), Martínez took to writing in *Antinazi*, the antifascist magazine founded in 1942, whose readership largely consisted of the literate working class. AFE had to not only aim its efforts at the traditional barriers constructed by partisan politics, but also needed to address the indifference of labor unions and cultural customs that discouraged women's participation.<sup>26</sup>

AFE had a two-pronged approach to gender issues in the workforce: political and practical. The group wrote to the National Assembly, urging the continuation of *leyes especiales* for women. AFE stated that if the Assembly repressed such policies, it would "make us retrocede to centuries past, during which woman was a slave and propagator of the species..."<sup>27</sup> Utilizing ideas of modernity, AFE defended policies that protected women in the workforce and gave them chances for advancement. While writing to the Assembly symbolized AFE's ideals and tenets, it did little to solve immediate problems. The group also remained practical and focused on campaigns that aided women in their daily struggles. For example, AFE allocated funds to build daycares for working mothers.<sup>28</sup> By alleviating some of the barriers to women laborers, such as the inability to organize or join unions due to family constraints, AFE could enhance the roles of women in labor.

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<sup>26</sup> Rosa Sol, "Nuestro Saludo a las Mujeres Trabajadores," *Antinazi* 18, Quito, March 12, 1943, 2; Nela had to write under the pseudonym "Rosa Sol" after 1938 due to state censoring of Communist voices.

<sup>27</sup> Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana to the President of the National Assembly, Post-1944, Alianza Femenina PP197, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>28</sup> "Alianza Femenina Dara Zapatos a los Niños en Edad Escolar," *El Dia*, Quito, August 22, 1944.

Literacy and education, the most important factors to citizenship under the Liberal state, became a focal point of AFE's outreach. In 1940, Nela Martínez and Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre partnered with Dolores Cacuango in establishing bilingual schools in Ecuador's rural highland region of Cayambe.<sup>29</sup> The importance of bilingual education, which respected and accounted for Ecuador's Indigenous heritage, broke with the Liberal Party's attempts at modernity and nationhood. In fact, Liberal visions of Indigenous assimilation and integration sharply conflicted with Indigenous desires and expectations, resulting in the failure of most government-led education projects. Communists hoped that education would lead to the liberation of the working class, but according to Marc Becker, Ecuadorian *hacienda* landowners rejected the idea of an learned rural workforce and often created obstacles to schools like those supported by Nela Martínez and Dolores Cacuango.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the alliance of urban Communists and rural Indigenous groups provided vital schooling to Cayambe's youth, a rare act in an Andean state.

Alongside the Indigenous schools, AFE reached out to women in prisons in hopes that education would help them become active and productive members of society. In collaboration with the National Union of Journalists (*Union Nacional de Periodistas*), AFE began the first ever literacy campaign in 1944 for women prisoners. In the program, every prisoner received a "godmother" who taught them to read and write, and had coffee with them. AFE also distributed cloth, needles, and string for women to learn sewing a

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<sup>29</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Marc Becker, "Race, Gender, and Protest in Ecuador," in *Work, Protest, and Identity in Twentieth-Century Latin America*, ed. Vincent C. Peloso (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 136-137; For more information on the bilingual schools in Cayambe, see: Raquel Rodas, *Crónica de un sueño, las escuelas indígenas de dolores Cacuango* (Quito: PEBI-GTZ, 1998).

means of securing some sort of income after their release.<sup>31</sup> The campaign attempted to foster a maternal relationship between godmother and prisoner, transcending the class and racial divides that would have normally kept them apart. While AFE's maternalism, in some ways, mirrored upper-class paternalist traditions, the group eschewed these traditions by treating incarcerated and Indigenous women as rights-bearing citizens. AFE's literacy campaigns aided these women by providing practical education. But more importantly, it aimed to prepare them for formal participation in politics and the state.

Not all of *Alianza's* women participated in activism in the style of Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante, the radical Liberal whose writings directly addressed citizenship and suffrage for women in Ecuador. Instead, seemingly charitable acts, such as shoes for children and literacy for the incarcerated and Indigenous groups, contained highly political ideas of citizenship, education, and increased participation in the state. Furthermore, the work of AFE had long term goals, such as raising a generation of educated Ecuadorian men and women who could access politics, suffrage, and the full rights of a citizen.

### **Alliance with Antifascism**

AFE did not restrict its activities to domestic campaigns. Individual members wrote on the Spanish Civil War, and later, on the spread of fascism and the outcome of World War II. Doing so added women's voices to the international arena of debates and the exchange of ideas, solidifying their role as members of democracy and participants in the struggle against totalitarianism. It also gave an opportunity for women to critique domestic problems and argue that the country's unequal system, which excluded women,

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<sup>31</sup> Although this campaign began after the May Revolution of 1944, it demonstrates the hands-on methods of AFE and the group's expansion into various projects after 1944.

could potentially foster fascism in Ecuador. Upon the fall of the Spanish Republic, the magazine *El Debate* published the response of Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante, who stated “We should be happy to be democratic republicans and negotiate to make that dream a reality one day, because between you and me...Ecuadorians understand democracy like I understand Chinese...”<sup>32</sup> Cárdenas de Bustamante highlighted the broken democracy within Ecuador that primarily excluded her sex in the hopes of rectifying the issue while at the same time recognizing the long and exhaustive battle ahead.

Nela Martínez met Raymond Meriguet, the progenitor of Ecuador’s antifascist movement, in 1936 when he first arrived in Ecuador. The two continued as friends and went about their own agendas for enhancing labor and civil rights in Ecuador.<sup>33</sup> But when Raymond began the *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* (MPAE), following the 1941 Communist International decision to cooperate with the Allies, Nela joined as one of the co-founders and members of its first executive board. Martínez stated that for AFE, “[o]ur moment of most development was from 1941 until 1944, on the eve of the 28th of May.”<sup>34</sup> Antifascism fostered favorable conditions for Nela and leftist women to organize labor, gain greater rights for women, and affiliate with a powerful movement without alienating the conservative members of the organization. The ideology served as a glue, holding together the extensive network of women that Martínez had managed to bring together. She stated:

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<sup>32</sup> Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante, “Valiosa opinión de prominente dama ecuatoriana sobre el reconocimiento al Gobierno de Franco,” in *Ecuador Y La Guerra Civil Española: La Voz De Los Intelectuales*, ed. Niall Binns (Madrid: Calambur, 2012), 178.

<sup>33</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Since it was a broad movement, we admitted everyone who wanted to participate. The circumstances of the war and the expansion of fascism caused a shift in the radical position of the [Communist] party. The fundamental elements of the political ideology did not change, but when the objectives were broadened, like in the case of the fight for peace, alliances were agreed upon. Due to them, we worked with Catholics and with people who were not aligned with the left.<sup>35</sup>

Under the veil of antifascism, women and men of the left could push agendas, such as strengthening labor, as a necessary means of preventing totalitarianism in the hemisphere. And as a broad movement, it opened a space of agreement between activists of various ideologies to unite on fundamental reforms in Ecuador and abroad - an opportunity not possible before World War II. For *Alianza*, it also meant a greater integration in the country's politics, previously denied to most women like Dolores Cacuangó who, due to her race and illiteracy, could not hope to attain citizenship under Liberal governance.

Martínez inserted herself in the agenda of MPAE as part of its executive committee, signing off as Secretary of Organization and Propaganda in its manifestos and aiding in the group's discussions and assemblies. In *El Comercio*, Nela wrote as "Rosa Sol" once again to call for the unity of men and women from all countries and social classes to end fascism, and to express solidarity to countries under siege by Axis powers.<sup>36</sup> Nela Martínez's writings addressed Ecuadorian men and women equally and cast their roles in the battle against fascism as one in the same. Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante wrote from the other side of the aisle, stating "I will never be a fascist, even less a Soviet; I detest dictatorships..."<sup>37</sup> Cárdenas de Bustamante and other Liberal

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>36</sup> "Manifiesto del Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador," December 11, 1941 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 16; Rosa Sol, "Frente Antifascista," *El Comercio*, Quito, November 19, 1941.

<sup>37</sup> Cárdenas de Bustamante, "Valiosa," 178.

women recognized the importance of disassociating from fascism and allying with democracy, especially in the face of World War II and pressure from the United States. Ecuadorian antifascist sentiment had begun in the 1930s against its own government, and continued as the movement grew internationally. Cárdenas de Bustamante's writings demonstrate the manner in which Ecuadorians translated international ideologies and imposed them on their own reality to explain the failing Liberal government's growing authoritarianism. Alternatively, her statement also shows how antifascism could unite disparate, even opposing, political doctrines. Liberals and Conservatives almost all universally disavowed Communism. Hipatia Cárdenas de Bustamante, a Liberal, would never accept the Communist agenda of Nela Martínez despite sharing a goal of equal rights for women. Nonetheless, AFE contained and suppressed these hostilities within a framework of antifascism, women's advancement, and democracy — broad concepts that could encompass diverse desires.

Indigenous groups in Ecuador also took up the cause of antifascism as a means of accessing global politics. Dolores Cacuango led the charge of antifascism among the Indigenous groups of Cayambe, linking Indigenous liberation with the liberation of countries under Nazi control. She translated Allied propaganda into Quechua (the native language of Ecuador's Indigenous groups), and organized Indigenous antifascist committees. Cacuango also represented the Indigenous movement at the 1943 Provincial Conference of the MPAE. Meanwhile, the Indigenous magazine *Nucanchic Allpa*, which Communists helped to found in the 1930s and maintained through the 1940s, frequently printed updates on the war front, messages from President Roosevelt, and the actions of the Soviet Union, all in Quechua. Along with updates from the war, *Nucanchic Allpa*



disseminated information about the Liberal government, protests and strikes across the country, and messages from the Communist Party on schooling, property rights, and even drinking habits. These acts and publications connected Ecuador's Indigenous groups to a global exchange of information previously unavailable to them. In turn, Indigenous groups in Cayambe and elsewhere pledged their allegiance to the Allies and the cause of antifascism in the hopes that the end of World War II would also bring them benefits.<sup>38</sup>

In the midst of 1940s Comintern policies and the invasion of Soviet Russia during World War II, AFE was able to utilize antifascism as a tool to further their political aims. Nonetheless, the war had taken global attention away from tensions in Latin America, which by the 1940s had reached a climax in an overlooked corner of the globe. When, in July of 1941, Ecuador and Peru fought a month-long war over disputed territory in the Amazon and southern highlands of Ecuador, the tensions finally caught the attention of the United States. Although it was a significant event for South America, a war in the Andes only frustrated the international Allied community as Hitler was continuing his invasion. Ecuadorians, nonetheless, attempted to bring international attention to the war. *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* denounced Peruvian aggression in the newspaper *El Comercio*, but it was Zoila Ugarte de Landívar who penned the most outspoken response.<sup>39</sup> The war with Peru in 1941 prompted Landívar, a Liberal co-founder of AFE,

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<sup>38</sup> "Dolores Cacuango," *Antinazi* 19, April 17, 1943, 4; Nela Martínez, "Prologo," in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), i-iii; *Nucanchic Allpa* 6, Quito, March 1935; *Nucanchic Allpa* 8, Quito, March 17, 1936; *Nucanchic Allpa* 10, Quito, February 11, 1939; *Nucanchic Allpa* 11, Quito, April 27, 1939; *Nucanchic Allpa* 14, Quito, February 25, 1940; *Nucanchic Allpa* 15, Quito, May 28, 1940; *Nucanchic Allpa* 16, Quito, November 5, 1944.

<sup>39</sup> "Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana denuncia la injusta agresión peruana," *El Comercio*, Quito, July 17, 1941.

# LA GUERRA EUROPEA

## Europamanda guerra

## La guerra Europea

Caimandaca caru carupi, indi llugshig ladomarmi shug Alemania nishca, Italia nishca Inglaterra nishca, Francia nishca llactacuna tian.

Inglaterra chusco chungu chusco huaranga huaranga gentocunani tian; Francia chusco chungu ishcai huaranga huaranga; Alemania, leon chungu huaranga huaranga.

Chai llactacunapi, hacienda charigunalla, fabricacuna charigunalla, banco nishcapi huaranga huaranga chilquita charigunalla, ricocunallami gobierno tucun. Shina yuyapica, tauc huaranga huaranga huacha gentocunani yarjaimanda huafun.

Riocunatami capitalista nirin; huachacuna, proletario Capitalistacuna ociosocunani; chaimandami fabricacunapi trabajadorecuna sudormanda, allpacu, nata tarpudorecuna sudormanda causan. Shina yuyapica huachacuna trabajadorecunani. Allpacumanda, huasimanda, animalcumanda achija impuestoacuna cobrangapallami ricocunaca pobreacuna yuyarin; shinallata, paicunaca haciendacunapi, paicunaca fabricacunapi, casi mana samachishpa, pishi pishi jornalacuna, salarionata pagashpa trabajachin gapi. Alemantallapish, ricocunaca allpacunaca tarpudorecunapi, trabajadorecuna sudormandami causan; Franciapi, capi

rungapa, imperialista gobierno pura macanajuegapa imperialista gobiernocuna ninan achija armamentotami rurrachin, randin; chaipimi tian: chonguna, buque de guerracuna, angashna jahuata purig avionacuna, ametralladorecuna, fusilecuna Chaitucni armamentocunahuanga, chaimandaca, trabajadorecunalla, obrerecunalla, pobreacunallami huafuchirin; hayachnehi canajuegapa mana rinchu, huafunata manchaimanta. Chai, mandaca, chai tucni huafuchina armamentotaca obrerecunallata, trabajador cunallata, pobreacunallatami ruran... Ricocunapi (imperialista) guerra:

cunapi, macanajuegapa pobreacuna taitacuna, churicuna, rigicuna, huasimacuna, huafuchinami huafun; yapicuna, tarpicunap shi jishashca quenda; pueblecunapash, huasimacuna rupashpa uchufalla tucushca. Chaimandaca, capitalistacuna, hacendadocuna, fabricacuna charigunaca huaranga huarangemi, curi cagpi, culqui cagpipash bolsillocunapi jundachin, achija achija armamentota, gr. nocunata jatushpa.

Na ishcai chungu pichija huatami: chai tiempopimi shug ninan guerra, chusco huatacman, Europa llactapi tiarea Shug ladomandaca, Inglaterra, Francia, Rusia, Italia, Estados Unidos mishca llactacunani

Muy lejos de aquí, y hacia el lado por donde sale el sol, hay unos países, que se llaman Alemania, Italia, Inglaterra, Francia.

En Inglaterra hay cuarenta y cuatro millones de habitantes; en Francia, cuarenta y dos millones; en Alemania, noventa millones.

En estos países gobiernan solamente los hacendados, los dueños de las fábricas, los banqueros, los ricos. En cambio, millones de gente pobre mueren de hambre.

A los ricos se les llama capitalistas; y a los pobres proletarios.

Los capitalistas son ociosos y viven del trabajo del obrero y del campesino; mientras tanto, los proletarios son trabajadores.

Los ricos se acuerdan de los pobres únicamente para cobrarles crecidos impuestos por sus tierras, por sus casas y por sus animales; así como también para obligarles a trabajar casi sin descanso en sus haciendas y en sus fábricas, pagándoles muy escasos jornales y salarios. En Alemania, por ejemplo, los ricos viven del sudor del campesino, del trabajador; en Francia, los capitalistas se enriquecen con el trabajo del pobre; en Inglaterra, los hacendados y los dueños de las fábricas explotan a los obreros y campesinos; en Italia, los millones de pobres trabajan únicamente para engordar a los latifundistas y a los capitalistas.

No contentos con la explotación al pobre, y en el afán de enriquecerse

los capitalistas, los hacendados, los dueños de las fábricas se llenan de millones sus bolsillos, porque venden grandes cantidades de armamento y de productos agrícolas.

De 1914 a 1918, es decir, durante cuatro largos años, hubo una gran guerra en Europa. De un lado, combatían Inglaterra, Francia, Rusia, Italia y Estados Unidos. En esa época, Rusia estaba gobernada por unos malvados capitalistas, los Zares, que mataban y oprimían salvajemente a los trabajadores. También tomaban parte en esa guerra varias pequeñas naciones, en calidad de sirvientes. Estos eran los del un bando. De otro lado, luchaban Alemania, Austria, Hungría y Turquía, y, además, varios pequeños países, igualmente en calidad de sirvientes. Pelearon por arrebatarse los territorios, las colonias, a fin de enriquecerse vendiendo a éstas sus productos industriales y explotando las riquezas de las mismas. En esta guerra de cuatro años murieron muchos millones de trabajadores, obreros y campesinos. Otros quedaron sin piernas, sin brazos, ciegos, heridos.

Mientras tanto, los capitalistas se ocupaban en comer, beber, dormir y divertirse.

Pero llegó un momento en que los ciento ochenta millones de habitantes de Rusia se cansaron de la guerra imperialista, puesto que todos morían de hambre y perecían en los campos de batalla. Y un buen día, millones de obreros,

Translated Quechua article in *Nucanchic Allpa* 14, Quito, February 25, 1940.

to write an exhaustive essay critiquing the letter of Elisa Rodríguez Parra de García Rosell, president of the Pro-Cultural Feminist Legion in Peru. Rosell had written a letter to *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* stating that Peruvian women supported peace, justice and liberty and urged AFE to “do all you can to convince our sisters of Ecuador of that same sentiment.”<sup>40</sup> Landívar, in response, wrote to the international community, stating that Rosell’s letter urged Ecuadorian women to act due to the fact that Peruvian women could not. Her message illustrates the intense nationalism present in Ecuador at the time, and she portrayed the government of Peru as vicious and brutal. Peru, she states, was so

<sup>40</sup> Zoila Ugarte de Landívar, “Mensaje de una dama peruana a las mujeres ecuatorianas,” *Espejo*, 1941, 26-28 in *Orígenes del feminismo en el Ecuador*, ed. Ana María Goetschel (Quito: CONAMU, 2006), 133; For more on the life of Zoila Ugarte de Landívar, see: Alejandro Guerra Cáceres, *Zoila Ugarte Landívar: Pionera Del Periodismo Femenino Del Ecuador* (Guayaquil, Ecuador: Vicerrectorado Académico, 1990).

entrenched in militarism, repression, *caudillismo*, and espionage that Peruvian women, “who live with their noble desires in this ambience of oppression,” were convinced they could do nothing to stop the war.<sup>41</sup> She used Rosell’s letter as a means of demonstrating women’s opposition to the war, but also the militarism of Peru and Ecuador’s loyalty to Pan-Americanism and hemispheric unity. Her essay commended the soldiers of Ecuador who “held at bay the twenty thousand invaders, fighting one against ten,” and highlighted the atrocities of the Peruvian forces, including attacks on the Red Cross, civilians and hospitals, and the bombing of undefended cities.<sup>42</sup> She argued that in the midst of the war, Ecuador showed its colors as a defender of democracy and ally to the cause of hemispheric unity, while Peru’s intentions were pro-fascist: “Who arms Peru? Against whom is Peru armed?”<sup>43</sup> Landívar’s essay reveals the use of a local language and spirit as a means of inserting women into the male dominated spheres of war and nationalism, which in turn could open access to citizenship, power, and national influence. Under US pressure for hemispheric unity, Ecuador and Peru agreed on a ceasefire at the end of July. Further pressure from the United States then prompted Ecuador to sign the Rio Protocol, much to the dismay of Ecuadorians. The combination of Germany’s invasion of Russia and lack of concern for Ecuador’s territorial loss helped to launch the antifascist movement in Ecuador, with whom AFE quickly affiliated. Later, as the movement to remove Carlos Arroyo del Río and the Liberal Party from the presidency gained traction,

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<sup>41</sup> Landívar, “Mensaje,” 134.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

members of AFE joined the anti-Arroyo alliance in hopes of expanding women's representation in Ecuador's government.<sup>44</sup>

Originally, the plan of AFE was to stir the recognition of women's contribution to society and politics. However, "the action was enriched immensely with the occurrence (*acontecimiento*) of World War II."<sup>45</sup> Despite its enormous territorial loss, Ecuador remained a part of the Allied front, and so Ecuadorians could hope to reap from the benefits of an Allied win. Therefore, the international defense of democracy prompted greater aspirations for AFE and an enhancement of its goals. World War II catalyzed a "growth in the feminine consciousness..." and highlighted the need for women to participate in politics and labor.<sup>46</sup> World War II and the global antifascist movement gave women like Nela Martínez the opportunity and rhetoric to expand definitions of democracy at home. She argued that World War II "obligated women to assume responsibilities" which "contributed to the success of Victory" and as a result they had to "assume new and more serious (*graves*) responsibilities in the face of...the future of the Ecuadorian nation."<sup>47</sup> In a radio broadcast, Matilde Hidalgo de Procel expressed similar sentiments, stating that post-WWII Ecuadorian women would need to "strip away the dead leaves of preconceptions, false ideas and customs..."<sup>48</sup> The idea of breaking down old customs after WWII appealed to a broad audience. Although the goals of Hidalgo de Procel differed greatly from women like Dolores Cacuango, the aspiration of a new society after World War II that split with conservative traditions and opened new paths

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<sup>44</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>47</sup> Nela Martínez, Speech, May 27, 1945, Alianza Femenina PP198, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>48</sup> "La mujer ecuatoriana se preocupa de la misión que desempeñara en la post-guerra," *El Comercio*, Quito, August 1, 1944.

for both men and women was universal. The sweeping “away of dead leaves” served as an ambiguous metaphor which allowed for diverse interpretations, yet contained the clear message of broad social change. To every woman who affiliated with the Allies and participated in the antifascist movement, the end of World War II promised future with more rights, protections, and opportunities.

Despite the early activities of Martínez and other women in the antifascist movement, their presence went unnoticed or under appreciated. At an MP AE General Assembly held on July 3, 1942, Rodrigo Chávez called for the participation of women in the antifascist struggle, particularly in the home. Nela Martínez, who was present at the assembly, heard his words and reacted forcefully.<sup>49</sup> *El Comercio*’s January 17, 1943 list of re-elected MP AE executive board members does not mention Nela Martínez. She likely left the committee after her term to focus on AFE, and in particular, developing the group’s antifascist stance. If so, it explains the explosion in antifascist organizing by AFE shortly afterwards.<sup>50</sup> On February 11, 1943, AFE was named as a co-sponsor and co-organizer to an antifascist assembly dedicated to the successes of the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup> This is the first time AFE appears as a peer of MP AE in the antifascist movement, coming on the heels of the 1942 General Assembly, but it would not be the last. During MP AE’s 1943 Provincial Conference, held from September 20-27, *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana*

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<sup>49</sup> “De la ultima manifestación antitotalitaria,” *La Defensa*, Quito, July 3, 1942.

<sup>50</sup> “Movimiento Popular antitotalitario eligió nuevo directorio,” *El Comercio*, Quito, January 17, 1943.

<sup>51</sup> “Hoy se conmemoram las victorias del Ejército Rojo y de los ejércitos de las Naciones Unidas en: Stalingrado y Tripoli,” February 11, 1943 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségat (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 189.

again appears on the charter, represented by Nela Martínez.<sup>52</sup> On AFE's membership cards (*carnets*), antifascism became encoded in the group's mission, promising to combat "all fascist theory and action, outward or hidden" alongside proclamations to fight against division among Ecuadorians and "the privileges of class, race, and nation that are built upon the oppression of the weak."<sup>53</sup> Presenting women as opponents of fascism, AFE utilized a global trend of democratic defense to raise themselves to the status of allies and partners in the Popular Front and World War II. Martínez's efforts finally gained the attention of MPAE members. By December 29, 1943 she was back on the regional executive committee, listed as head of women's organizing (*Secretaria de Organización Femenina*).<sup>54</sup>

Martínez later noted that, while the German invasion of the Soviet Union did prompt an international response by Communists to defend their homelands against fascism, it was the government of Carlos Arroyo del Río that became the target for antifascists as Liberal policies became more repressive and repetitively failed to defend the country's citizens.<sup>55</sup> For example, during the war against Peru, Matilde Hidalgo de Procel's home region of Loja was a center of combat due to its location on the border. She and her husband helped to evacuate Ecuadorians from the battlegrounds, but the lack

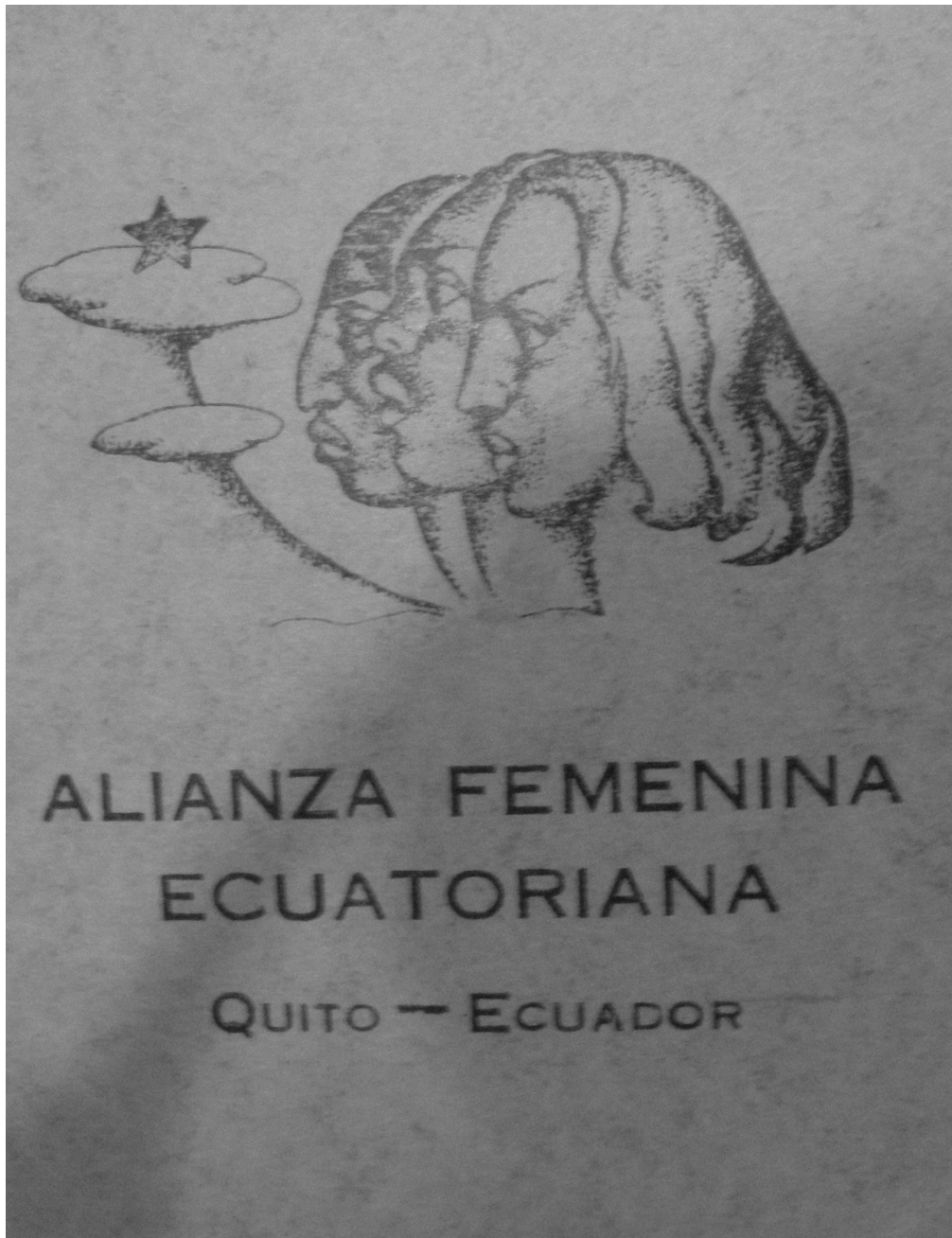
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<sup>52</sup> Movimiento Antifascista del Ecuador, "Informes y Resoluciones: Conferencia Provincial Antifascista de Pichincha, Septiembre 20-27 de 1943," in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 277; It should be noted that Dolores Cacuango also attended as the representative for Indigenous groups.

<sup>53</sup> Membership Card of Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana, Documentos Personales, Folio 3, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>54</sup> "El Comité Regional de la Sierra del M.A.E.," *Antinazi* 27, December 29, 1943, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Martínez, "Prologo," i-iii.



AFE Membership Card, Quito, 1940s, card, Archivo Martínez-Meriguet.

of response by Carlos Arroyo del Río in the face of Peruvian forces resulted in her own personal vendetta against the president.<sup>56</sup>

Mirroring the antifascist group MPAE, AFE began affiliating with the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance), an alliance of leftists, Conservatives, and independent Liberals aimed at electing the populist candidate, José María Velasco Ibarra in the 1943-1944 presidential elections. Within this movement, Nela Martínez served as the representative of AFE, and in 1944 even accompanied ADE's executive board to visit Velasco Ibarra, who was in exile in Chile. Of their first meeting, Martínez recounted, "Velasco spoke the way he always spoke, for in his speeches he was very progressive, in his writings, less, and in his actions, even less."<sup>57</sup> Within their first meeting, the seeds of discord can be seen between the progressive left and José María Velasco Ibarra. The hostility would eventually result in a breakdown of their alliance and open conflict after the May Revolution of 1944.

As the pro-Velasco Ibarra movement picked up steam in 1943 and 1944, *velasquistas* (supporters of Velasco Ibarra) clashed with the government's police forces, known as the *carabineros*. Their skirmishes led to a number of injuries and deaths, and one particular conflict culminated in the death of María del Carmen Espinosa on May 21, 1944, seven days before the May 28 Revolution. According to reports, groups of *velasquistas* in Quito were protesting the arrest of their comrades (three men and two women). At 7:00pm, fifteen-year-old María del Carmen Espinosa was on her way home from work when a stray bullet hit her in the head, killing her. Although the Commander General of the *Carabineros*, Colonel Héctor Salgado, stated a pedestrian fired the shot,

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<sup>56</sup> Estrada, *Mujer*, 136-139.

<sup>57</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 81.



the investigation concluded that the young girl had been killed by one Captain Gonzalo Lombeida. Newspapers emphasized Maria del Carmen's youth and innocence, and her highly publicized death became the symbol of the Ecuadorian people's struggle. She represented morality, decency, youth, and hard work, tragically cut down by a tyrannical government and its police force. She was suddenly transformed from her mother's daughter to Ecuador's daughter.<sup>58</sup> At her funeral, Nela Martínez gave an impassioned speech, stating that the spilling of innocent blood by Arroyo's government would serve as the final catalyst for Ecuadorians. She declared, "those who have usurped power against the wishes of the majority, they are using the usual methods of tyrants: prison, violence, insults and death. But they will achieve nothing, because the desire to triumph which sustains the Ecuadorian people in these bitter times is steel tipped."<sup>59</sup> Maria del Carmen Espinosa's death served as one of the final catalysts for the May Revolution.

In its final message to Ecuadorian women before the May 28<sup>th</sup>, AFE urged them not to be indifferent to the national and international political crises, to care for the country that men had ruined, and reminded them of the key roles German, Chinese, American and Soviet women were playing in the war.<sup>60</sup> Only a few days later, the women of AFE would mirror these key roles by participating in the May Revolution of 1944.

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<sup>58</sup> "Un muerto y varios heridos a causa de los incidentes de la campaña pre-electoral," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 22, 1944; "Aclaracion acerca de la muerte de María del Carmen Espinosa," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 23, 1944; "Autoridades de policía iniciaron ya el sumario por muerte de Carmen Espinosa," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 25, 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Nela Martínez, "Discurso pronunciado por Nela Martínez en los funerales de María del Carmen Espinosa en el Cementerio de San Diego," May 1944, in *Insumisas, Textos Sobre las Mujeres: Nela Martínez Espinosa*, ed. Nela Meriguet Martínez (Quito: M&M Impresiones, 2012), 114.

<sup>60</sup> "A Las Mujeres Ecuatorianas," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 21, 1944.

HOY LUNES 20 DE SETIEMBRE  
1943 A LAS 6 Y 15 P. M.

## Inauguración de la Conferencia Provincial **ANTIFASCISTA**

EN EL SALON MAXIMO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD CENTRAL

Organizada mediante los auspicios y representación  
de las siguientes entidades:

Movimiento Antifascista del Ecuador; Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios del Ecuador; Unión Sindical de Pichincha; Unión General de Empleados de Comercio; Sindicato Nacional de Educadores; Sindicato de Escritores y Artistas; Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana; Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano; Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano; Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana; Agrupación Cultural de Trabajadores, «Lombardo Toledano»; Sindicato Unión de Fábricas, «21 de Enero»; Sindicato de Operarios de Zapatería; Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Madera; Sociedad de Betuneros; Sindicato de Fotógrafos; Hermandad de Operarios de Peluquería; Sindicato Unico de Sastres y Modistas; Comité Antifascista de Cayambe; Comité de Defensa Indígena; Comité Indígena Antifascista de Yanahuaico; Comité Indígena Antifascista de Juan Montalvo; Acción Republicana Española y Movimiento Alemán Pro Democracia y Libertad.

### PROGRAMA DE LA SESION INAUGURAL:

- 1o.—Instalación de la Conferencia, por el Presidente del Comité Organizador, señor **Luis M. Pazmiño**, delegado de Agrupación Cultural de Trabajadores, «Lombardo Toledano»;
- 2o.—Discurso de apertura, por el **Lic. Isaac Santos**, Delegado de Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana;
- 3o.—«NUESTRA LUCHA FRENTE AL CONTENIDO DEL FASCISMO», por el señor **Raymond Mériguet**, Secretario General del Comité Regional del M. A. E.
- 4o.—Intervención del señor **Jorge Almeida S.**, delegado de la Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios del Ecuador;
- 5o.—Intervención del señor **Primitivo Barreto**, delegado de Unión Sindical de Pichincha; y
- 6o.—«LA GUERRA ANTIFASCISTA, NUESTRA GUERRA», por el conocido periodista y escritor austriaco, señor **Benno Weiser**.

### ANTIFASCISTAS:

El triunfo sobre el fascismo producirá la libertad de todos los pueblos. ¡Asistid a esta Conferencia y luchad a nuestro lado!!

Advertisement for joint MP AE, AFE, ADE Rally, Quito, 1943, leaflet, in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 268.

## Conclusion

Like feminist and women's organizations elsewhere, the women of AFE were organized into a group with the primary aim of improving the political rights and social standing of their sex. After the events of 1941 Peruvian-Ecuadorian War and the German invasion of Soviet Russia, an important tenet of the group also became antifascism as a means of expanding AFE's discourse and scope. What is unique about AFE is its engagement with local Ecuadorian realities and politics as a form of compliance with the international defense of democracy during World War II. According to women like Nela Martínez, providing shoes to school children contributed to the Allied cause since it also combated fascism, only through education instead of arms. Members translated these charitable acts into a form of socio-political engagement with national and international politics in the hopes of expanding women's rights. Furthermore, the alliance and relationships between Indigenous, urban, and rural women, along with their participation in the May Revolution, cannot simply be explained by the demands of the Popular Front or Comintern policies. Instead, they reflect the application of international ideas to uniquely Ecuadorian realities in an attempt to reform the country. In the end, the global defense of democracy created favorable conditions for the participation of Ecuadorian women in their nation's politics.

As discussed, AFE served as an umbrella for a spectrum of women who sought gender equality on their own terms. For Liberal women, AFE provided another opportunity to continue their protracted campaign for political rights, labor protections, and education reform. For women like Nela Martínez and Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre, AFE served as an extension of their work in the Communist Party. Although

Communism embraced women as fellow laborers and members of an oppressed class, it erased any idea of discrimination based on gender, and concluded that all oppression would be wiped out upon the success of a Communist Revolution. However, the daily realities of Communist women, especially in a country deemed unfit for a revolution, meant that political rights needed to be obtained through democratic means. Finally, for Indigenous women like Dolores Cacuangó, AFE's mission addressed the intersections of gender, class, and race which larger social movements and political parties overlooked. While the Indigenous movement and Communist Party pushed for greater political and agrarian rights and an end to racial oppression, AFE provided an opportunity for Indigenous women to engage with politics, which had been up that point historically inaccessible to them.

The agency AFE women gained from their illiteracy and poverty campaigns extended into their participation of the May 28 Revolution, and more importantly, aided in their attempt to carve a place for women in the new democracy of Ecuador. As the 1944 presidential elections grew closer, it became almost instinctive for AFE members to join the movement to remove Carlos Arroyo del Río - their participation in *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* both prepared and justified their inclusion. Furthermore, they saw José María Velasco Ibarra, the populist candidate, as a means to opening democracy in Ecuador during a period of international reform. While *La Defensa's* shocking story on Nazi activity in Ecuador stated that Heinz Shulte, the alleged Nazi leader, “was hiding himself (*ocultándose*) under the skirts of his wife”, the women of *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* combatted fascism alongside men to demonstrate their equality in the

defense of democracy.<sup>61</sup> For antifascist men and women, the fight against Nazism and the May Revolution of 1944 threw meanings of gender into flux and conflict. Heinz Schulte, who had concealed his Nazi activity “under the skirts of his wife,” became emasculated through his subversive activities. Politics of masculinity and the opening of traditionally masculine spaces became another channel where gender was contested in the shadows of the May Revolution of 1944, resulting in a distorted recording of its history.

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<sup>61</sup> “El lobo al lado de la oveja” and “La gestapo en acción: La ‘hacienda’ de Heinz Shulte,” *La Defensa*, September 8, 1942, 3-4 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 122-123.

### Chapter 3

#### **“This was my modest contribution”: Men, Women, and Memory in the May Revolution of 1944**

May 28, 1944 began as any other in Ecuador. In Quito, theaters were playing *La Resignada*, *Thunder Birds*, and *El Que Tenga Un Amor*, while *El Comercio* reported that in the Pacific Theater, American troops had landed on the Schouten Islands near the Philippines. Beginning at around 10:00 pm, the Ecuadorian army and citizens clashed with police forces in Guayaquil, igniting a revolt that quickly spread throughout the country. On May 30th, the coalition of leftists, Liberals and Conservatives forced the Liberal Party president, Carlos Arroyo del Río, to abdicate. In his place, they installed the populist José María Velasco Ibarra on May 31st. During the three days of chaos and anarchy, numerous women performed acts of rebellion that have been erased (often intentionally) from history. Motives for the revolution include the traditional suspects: economic downturn and political unrest. However, ideas of antifascism and the expansion of democracy also colored the motives of many participants in the revolution. No single trend or ideology can account for the outbreak of the May Revolution. Each individual who joined, participated, and died on May 28th did so for diverse reasons both personal and political. But their motives, as expressed in the rhetoric of the revolution, extended beyond economics. Leftists, Indigenous groups, and their allies wanted the fulfillment of a promise made by the Allies for an equal and just society in return for aiding in the defeat of fascism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Norteamericanos desembarcaron en islas Schouten a 800 millas de las Filipinas,” *El Comercio*, Quito, May 28, 1944; This revolution has been referred to by many historians and Ecuadorians rather romantically as the “Glorious Revolution” (*La Gloriosa*). I do not use this nickname for a number of reasons and instead refer to it as the May Revolution of 1944.

The movements of antifascists, labor, leftists and their allies during the 1940s targeted the Arroyo del Río regime and the Liberal party. However, their actions resulted in a counter-attack by the Liberal government, who relied on the police to suppress dissident voices. Members of *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador* (MPAE; Popular Anti-Totalitarian Movement of Ecuador), *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women's Alliance), and *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance) initially hoped to use democratic means to elect José María Velasco Ibarra in June of 1944 over the Liberal candidate, Miguel Ángel Albornoz, a protégé of Carlos Arroyo del Río. However, repression by the Liberal government mixed with fears of another round of electoral fraud, resulting in a call for revolution as the method of enacting democracy in Ecuador.

### **Resistance and Repression**

In order to counteract the rallies and publications of the pro-Velasco Ibarra front, the Liberal government resorted to using force. Demonstrations by *velasquistas*, who were supporters of Velasco Ibarra, often resulted in clashes with the government's police forces, known as *carabineros*. Consequently, the style of repression used by the Liberal government elicited men and women's accusations of authoritarianism towards the Arroyo del Río government, further strengthening the bonds between the antifascist MPAE and the political coalition known as ADE. Later, when the Liberal government arrested Raymond Mériguet and Gustavo Becerra, co-founders of the MPAE, general

body members of the group denounced the repression, limitations to free speech, censorship, and apparent fascism present within the country.<sup>2</sup>

With the elections growing closer, the Liberal government heightened its attempts at silencing leftists, antifascists, and *velasquistas*. In February of 1944, Liberals prevented Velasco Ibarra from entering the country to campaign for the presidential elections. In their opinion, a populist tour of the country would have raised *velasquista* morale to an all time high and intensified the violence between the two camps. The barring of his entrance resulted in condemnations from numerous political parties (and one particularly heated letter from Velasco Ibarra himself) as an obstruction to democratic procedure.<sup>3</sup>

The police forces, *carabineros*, elicited the greatest amount of anger from the government's critics. *Carabineros* worked alongside the Liberal party throughout the twentieth century, repressing revolts and strikes that threatened the party's economic policies or electoral domination. Alongside the clashes with *velasquistas* and members of the MPAE and ADE at various rallies, the *carabineros* fought with citizens and labor groups, resulting in deaths like that of Maria del Carmen Espinosa. By 1944, ADE justified the dismissal of Arroyo del Río largely on the grounds of *carabinero* repression.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "El Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario pide la libertad del Sr. Gustavo Becerra," *El Comercio*, Quito, July 7, 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Camilo Ponce Enríquez and J.R. Terán R., "Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana Junta Nacional," February 25, 1944, Statement, doc. 137, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Pólit, Quito, Ecuador; Velasco Ibarra to the Minister of Foreign Relations, August 31, 1943, doc. 9, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Pólit, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>4</sup> "Un niño sufrió síncope al ser seguido por un carabinero," *El Comercio*, Quito, February 21, 1942; "Muertos y heridos en el choque entre carabineros y civiles," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 29, 1942; "Nuevas prisiones políticas fueron hechas ayer," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 30, 1942; "Si triunfamos llamaremos a colaborar en el Gobierno a los adversarios," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 7, 1944; "Dos velasquistas fueron



For many who remembered the revolution, it was Arroyo's tyrannical policies that sparked the fire over long-held grievances against the Liberal party. Leftists connected their attempt to remove Arroyo del Río with a longer history of labor's suppression by the Liberal regime, transforming the fight against a single president into a movement that sought retribution and broad reform. Decades earlier, on November 15, 1922, the Liberal government ordered police forces to fire into a group of workers on a general strike in Guayaquil. Labor and leftists remembered the day as the "Guayaquil Massacre" and its symbolism appeared frequently in the rhetoric of leftists during the following decades. As grievances against Arroyo del Río increased, a number of his enemies noted that during the time of the massacre, Arroyo del Río was part of the Municipality of Guayaquil. They speculated that he might have even ordered the police brutality. In the rhetoric of Communists, Socialists, and other leftists, Carlos Arroyo not only represented the typical dictator, but also the corruption and degeneracy of an entire political ideology.<sup>5</sup>

*Velasquista* men and women further argued that the arrests by Carlos Arroyo del Río were no different than the tyranny of Spain in the nineteenth century. For them, it was time to gain independence once again.<sup>6</sup>

MPAE continually complained of the lack of government aid to the antifascist movement, especially in publishing the bi-monthly *Antinazi*. If the government was not contributing to the antifascist movement, the natural conclusion was that the government

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apresados," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 18, 1944; "Un muerto y various heridos a causa de los incidentes de la campaña pre-electoral," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 22, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> José Ignacio Guzman, "La transformación política del 28 de Mayo de 1944," Jorge Alberto Pólit Ortiz, "Antecedentes y recuerdos de la Revolución del 28 de Mayo de 1944," and Francisco Pólit Ortiz, "A los 40 años de la 'Gloriosa Revolución' del 28 de Mayo de 1944," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elías Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 42-46, 75-81, 91.

<sup>6</sup> "Mensaje de Comité Femenina Patria y Libertad," May 24, 1944, flyer, doc. 39, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Pólit, Quito, Ecuador.

itself held Falangist, Italian Fascist, or Nazi sympathies. For his work with labor, the antifascist leader Franklin Perez Castro was labeled an “enemy of the government” and became the target of police forces and censoring.<sup>7</sup> Relations between MPAE/ADE and the government of Arroyo del Río drastically soured in April of 1942 when police arrested Gustavo Becerra, the co-founder of the MPAE and treasurer to the group. Becerra had published negative comments regarding the government’s repression of free speech in the newspaper *El Correo*. Calling upon the rights of citizens in a true democracy and questioning the democratic nature of Arroyo’s government, MPAE and the newspaper *El Comercio* protested Becerra’s arrest.<sup>8</sup> As more time passed, antifascists, labor leaders, and independent citizens considered the government of Carlos Arroyo del Río to be authoritarian, and his styles of repression mirrored Nazism and Italian Fascism. *Antinazi* mourned the arrest, torture and murder of Francisco Mora Guerrero, a member of Guayaquil’s antifascist committee, by police forces. It denounced the cruelty of this “colonial Inquisition” run by a “modern Gestapo” in Ecuador.<sup>9</sup> The deaths and arrests of antifascist leaders in Ecuador meant the incarnation of domestic fascism.

According to Franklin Perez Castro, Arroyo only allowed an antifascist movement to organize in order to mask the flaws of the government. Even so, members remained careful when it came to dealing with Ecuador’s domestic and labor issues:

The government of Arroyo del Río, hoping that the national unity that it [the movement] advocated could appease the discontent of the masses,

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<sup>7</sup> “Antinazi amenazado a desaparecer,” *Antinazi* 20, May 24, 1943, 1; Franklin Perez Castro and Jaime Galarza Zavala, *Así Fue El 28 De Mayo: Conversaciones Con Jaime Galarza Zavala* (Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1990), 5.

<sup>8</sup> “El Comité Popular Antitotalitario del Ecuador y la prisión del Sr. Gustavo Becerra Tesorero del M.P.A.E.,” *Antinazi* 3, April 23, 1942, 6; “El Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario pide la libertad del Sr. Gustavo Becerra,” *El Comercio*, Quito, July 7, 1942; Four months after his arrest, Becerra was still being held in prison. He was, however, released in time for the events of May 28, 1944.

<sup>9</sup> “Horrendo atropello a un antifascista guayaquileño,” *Antinazi* 21, June 26, 1943, 8.

allowed, to some extent, the anti-fascist movement and therefore local authorities allowed these demonstrations within the Arroyo dictatorship. We initially had to act with great caution and very quietly push for concessions such was the case for labor...<sup>10</sup>

Leaders of the antifascist movement in Ecuador, most of whom also wanted to see a strong labor movement, carefully crafted the alliances between labor and antifascism. In the opinion of Castro, their crucial alliance led to tensions between the movement and the government. In Ecuador's case, links with labor carried a level of danger. Nonetheless, members went ahead and initiated dialogue between the two, forging a united front to repel totalitarianism through stronger labor relations. For Ecuadorians, domestic issues, such as the strengthening of labor, were not only key to antifascism — they were the primary aim of the movement. When the Liberal government proceeded to persecute these alliances, antifascism served as the rhetoric to denounce the Liberal regime and the justification for its removal. While Ecuadorians cared greatly about the rise of Nazism and Falangism in Europe and abroad (as demonstrated by their frequent publications on the topic), domestic reform was their primary means of adhering to the Allied front and resolving their immediate concerns.

Sentiment against Arroyo and the Liberal-Radical party within the antifascist movement came to a head when police arrested Raymond Mériquet at the end of October of 1943 on the charge of spreading Communist propaganda. Numerous magazines and newspapers immediately denounced Mériquet's arrest. The Guayaquil daily *El Universo* stated:

We have nothing to do with communists...But we must defend their right to exist as a political party and as a organization within a democratic country... It is therefore a manifested contradiction that Ecuador, which

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<sup>10</sup> Castro and Zavala, *Así*, 3.

calls itself democratic and antifascist, puts aside the law to a single citizen only for being “communist.”<sup>11</sup>

The Communist Party further protested Raymond’s arrest, stating he had no obligations or orders to spread Communist propaganda, and even if so, such activities were not grounds for arrest in a true democracy.<sup>12</sup> *Antinazi* dedicated its entire twenty-sixth issue to Raymond’s liberty, while newspapers like *El Universo*, *El Telegrafo*, and *El Dia* also joined in pressuring Arroyo del Río’s government to recognize its mistake. In their cries, student groups, newspapers, unions, labor groups, and political parties remembered Raymond Mériguet’s domestic activities and his work for the Ecuadorian people. Protestors fondly remembered the *Mingas Populares*, his aid to the earthquake victims of Valley de los Chillos, and his participation in the labor movement. On December 4, 1944, MPAE held a great assembly in support of Mériguet. Present were members ADE, unions, and political parties, and it was Zoila Vázconez de Mériguet, Raymond’s wife, who helped to organize the event.<sup>13</sup>

More importantly, in the writings of Mériguet and others, which proliferated during and after his arrest, the government of Carlos Arroyo del Río was attacked as authoritarian and similar to the Italian Fascist and Nazi governments in Europe. In a letter

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<sup>11</sup> “La Democracia y la Libertad de Pensamiento,” *El Universo*, Guayaquil, November 4, 1943; “El Secretario General del Movimiento Antifascista es Acusado de Comunista,” *El Telegrafo*, Guayaquil, October 31, 1943.

<sup>12</sup> “El Partido Comunista Protesta ante la Nacion,” November 1943, flyer, in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 308.

<sup>13</sup> “Acusado de comunismo ira confinado a Maldonado, Carchi, el Sr. Mériguet,” *El Telegrafo*, Guayaquil, November 3, 1943; “Notas Relampago,” *El Universo*, Guayaquil, November 1, 1943; “Lo Que No Se Entiende,” *El Dia*, Quito, November 15, 1943; “Se Pide al Sr. Ministro de Gobierno que Ordene Libertad de R. Mériguet,” *El Universo*, Guayaquil, November 2, 1943; “Una Asamblea en Favor de Todas Las Victimas de la Represion politica,” *El Dia*, Quito, November 7, 1943; “La Agrupación Cultural de Trabajadores ‘Lombardo Toledano’,” *Surcos*, Quito, December 6, 1943; “Libertemos a Raymond Mériguet,” *Antinazi* 26, November 27, 1943, 1; “Raymond Mériguet, Lider del Movimiento Antifascista del Ecuador,” *Antinazi* 27, December 29, 1943, 1.

dated April 27, 1944 and addressed to the incumbent Minister of the Government, Mériguet discussed the barbarous conditions of the jails and the tortures he witnessed and experienced, pleading with the government to end such activities. The story was shortly picked up and published by *El Universo* on May 19 of the same year - nine days before the May Revolution. By the end of 1943, the rhetoric of antifascism had joined the movement to remove Arroyo del Río, and the May Revolution of 1944 which finally overthrew his government became ideologically motivated, at least in part, by ideals of antifascism and the defense of democracy. Francisco Pólit Ortiz, a participant in the May Revolution, remembered that May 28, 1944 was a movement of antifascists for the ideals of democracy and patriotism. Another member of the movement, Alejandro Idrovo, stated that the country's war against fascism catalyzed a desire to end all forms of injustice within the state before the conclusion of World War II.<sup>14</sup>

### **May 28, 1944**

After the death of Maria Carmen Espinosa, tensions between the populace, the *carabineros*, and the Liberal government reached an all time high. Her funeral became a national event, where women's committees, *velasquistas*, members of ADE, MPAE, and AFE came together to express their collective grief over the death of a young girl and their anger with the Liberal government.<sup>15</sup> The few days between her death and the

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Mériguet to Gustavo Becerra, April 27, 1944 in *Antinazismo en Ecuador, Años 1941-1944: Autobiografía del Movimiento Antinazi de Ecuador (MPAE-MAE)*, ed. Raymond Mériguet Cousségal (Quito: Aquiles Henríquez López, 1988), 360-361; "La F.E.U.E. reclama la libertad de Prestes, Mériguet y demás luchadores antifascistas de América," *Antinazi* 30, February 29, 1944, 1; "Se pide al Sr. Ministro de Gobierno que Ordene Libertad de R. Meriguet," *El Universo*, Guayaquil, December 2, 1943; "Conferencia Provincial Antifascista," *Surcos*, Quito, October 4, 1943; Castro and Zavala, *Así*, 2; Francisco Pólit Ortiz, "A los 40 años de la 'Gloriosa Revolución' del 28 de Mayo de 1944" and Alejandro Idrovo, "A los cuarentas años de una gran insurrección popular," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984) 41, 52, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Sergio Enrique Girón, *La Revolución de Mayo* (Quito: Editorial Atahualpa, 1945), 115-117.

outbreak of the revolution saw a mingling of tension, murmurs of electoral fraud, and demands that citizens be able to vote without impediment. The magazine *Democracia*, two days before the revolution, published an article stating women needed to participate in politics to save the country.<sup>16</sup> Within 48 hours, women would be following through with its call.

Many accounts exist on the May 28 Revolution, almost all written by participants or recorded from memory. In the historiography, the focus of the revolution's memory has centered on the role of Ecuador's army and members of the *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana*. Additionally, numerous testimonies served as propaganda for the Velasco Ibarra regime.<sup>17</sup> A number of unexplored and under-analyzed accounts, on the other hand, shed new light on the days leading to the revolution. Memories of women such as Nela Martínez reveal the deliberate erasure of women and leftists in order to construct a "glorious" revolution. Others, like those of Isabel Herreria and Ana Moreno, highlight the experiences and desires of its participants and the overall *inglorious* nature of the revolution. Almost all touch on the frustrated ambitions of leftists and reformers in the aftermath of the 28<sup>th</sup> of May.

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<sup>16</sup> "'Si pierdo por el fraude electoral, lucharé contra el regimen usurpador, continuación del actual' dice el Dr. Velasco Ibarra," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 24, 1944; "Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana na ha Laborado en favor del Resurgimiento de la Patria," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 26, 1944, "Conocida intelectual habla para 'Democracia'," *Democracia* 28 May 26, 1944, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Examples include: Victor Emilio Estrada, *Para la historia: mayo 28-septiembre 3 de 1944* (Guayaquil: Artes Gráf. Senefelder, 1945); José Aurelio Naranjo Campaña, *Verdades sobre la Revolución de Mayo: el Batallón de Infantería "Carchi" en La Gloriosa: efemérides del 28 y 29 de mayo de 1944, en Guayaquil* (Quito: Edit. Escuela Central Técnica, 1945), and Manuel Araujo Hidalgo, *El 28 de mayo: balance de una revolución popular, documentos para la historia* (Quito: Talleres gráfico nacionales, 1946).



Unidentified photographer, La Gloriosa, May 30, 1944, photo.

Accounts agree that the revolt in Guayaquil broke out once word reached members of ADE that *carabineros* had arrested the treasurer of the organization, Enrique Barruezueta the night of May 27<sup>th</sup>. According to Sergio Giron, a participant in the May Revolution and a Captain in the Ecuadorian army, a revolution had been considered and planned, but never executed. In the months leading up the revolution, alliances had been formed among members of ADE and the army against the Liberal government and the *carabineros*, likely in the hopes of redistributing the political power held by the latter two. The members of the army that participated in the revolution were mostly drawn from frustrated captains and mid-level officers, many of who often held leftist sympathies. With Barruezueta's arrest, members of ADE feared the discovery of the plot,

and as a result, broke out into revolt at 10:00 pm.<sup>18</sup> Targets of revolutionaries included the barracks of the *carabineros*, offices of the government, and ADE's enemies within the city.<sup>19</sup> Giron states that the revolution was begun and led by the army, with a number of battalions and infantries and minimal aid from members of ADE. Members of the army bled into the streets, clashing with *carabineros*, taking government buildings (most importantly, the office of telecommunications) and hijacking police vehicles. They armed civilians, hundreds of which died in the streets of Guayaquil during the three days of rebellion. Far from an entirely spontaneous, disorganized affair, the revolution in Guayaquil was both methodologically planned and meticulously carried out.<sup>20</sup> By 12:00 am, the ADE and army coalition had successfully captured the surrounding areas of the army barracks, but continued clashing with *carabineros* in the streets.<sup>21</sup> The following two days of the revolution in Guayaquil saw skirmishes between the army, its civilian and ADE allies, and the *carabinero* forces around the city. Government officials held out against the anti-Arroyo front in a number of buildings. Firing between the two continued until the submission of the police forces on May 31st. Dozens of deaths on both sides were compounded by the hundreds of wounded, including women and children. Clinics of the Red Cross around the city were flooded. In his account, Sergio Giron acknowledges the fact the women and men both participated in the fighting, but his analysis largely centers on the movements of the army.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Girón, *Revolución*, 167-168.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 174-185.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 183-202.



The testimony of Franklin Perez Castro, a militant Communist and leader of the antifascist movement in Guayaquil, brings an alternative reading of the May Revolution. To Castro, one of the biggest factors in the revolution was the antifascist movement and the anti-totalitarian sentiment of the population. In fact, according to Castro, economic downturn had little to do with the outbreak, which shows the various intersecting and oscillating motivations of participants in the revolution. Castro, who participated in the uprising, joined the forces of Sergio Girón and affirms Girón's statement that a revolution had already been in the works. Each night, Castro stated he would gather thirty or so revolutionaries in his home, or in the home of one of his friends, to await the signal for a revolt. On the night of May 28<sup>th</sup>, after the arrest of Enrique Barruezueta, Castro received the notice from ADE that the revolution would finally be carried out. The signal, he states, was the shot of a rifle. When the shot finally went off, almost all of the revolutionaries knew their roles and places. They joined with the army in the streets in order to fight the *carabineros*, while Castro himself rode into the streets in order to convince citizens to join the revolution (he states he successfully gathered around 500 people). Interestingly, according to Castro, the leaders of ADE arrived late and played a minimal role in the revolution. The revolution, in the end, was conducted by the people.<sup>23</sup>

Accounts of men like Sergio Giron and Franklin Perez Castro note the participation of men and women, but give no specific names and only acknowledge an anonymous mass, masking individual acts and accomplishments in the revolution. In addition, these mainstream accounts imagine the revolution as a largely masculine space. It was an area where members of ADE, the army, and the government forces of Carlos

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<sup>23</sup> Castro and Zavala, *Así*, 15-25.

Arroyo del Río contested masculinity. Nela Martínez's account serves as an alternative example of the style of revolution in Quito and the deliberate erasure of women in the construction of the revolution's memory.

News of the revolt reached Quito on May 29. *El Comercio*'s headline read: *Subversive Movement Breaks Out in Guayaquil*.<sup>24</sup> However, since the means of communication had been cut off, members of ADE and their supporters in Quito had very little information as to the events in their sister city. In the capital, Nela Martínez and Luis Eduardo Lasso, a supporter of Velasco Ibarra, gathered *velasquistas*, students, women, and members of ADE in order to prepare a defense. When word reached Quito that Guayaquileños had taken the barracks of the *carabineros*, the revolt in the country's capital began. Laborers in Quito began a general strike, while members of the police forces attempted to parlay with ADE. Talks ended when the *carabineros* refused to give up their arms. The coalition of students, women, members of the army and ADE, joined by the bonds of antifascism and anti-Arroyo sentiment, then moved forward with the revolution.<sup>25</sup>

Nela Martínez recalled that she gathered students, laborers, and members of AFE including Matilde Nogales, Maria Luisa Gomez de la Torre, Aurora Estrada y Ayala, Raquel Verdesoto, Virginia Larenas, Mercedes Pacheco, and Piedad Satana, to prepare a defense from the *carabineros*. On the night of May 29<sup>th</sup>, as fighting broke out in the streets of Quito, Martínez stated:

I 'awakened' and said that the power was in the Government Palace, so I went there with a few students, all unarmed, and we occupied it. There

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<sup>24</sup> "Movimiento Subversivo Estallo en Guayaquil," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 29, 1944.

<sup>25</sup> Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 81-82; There are few accounts as to exactly how the revolution played out in Quito.

was a wonderful effervescence of a people who needed a direction, desperate to make a revolution. I then reunited the employees of the Palace and I asked them to take care of the objects, because there should not have even been a pencil lost. Also, I sent a few to go take inventory. When we took it [the palace] it was early morning, and there was no presidential guard. In the office of the Minister of Government, Aurelio Aguilar Cuenca Vasquez, we found the lists of prisoners and those persecuted and we set to give orders for their freedom, to ratify the remaining governors or instruct members of ADE to take power in each site that we knew of.<sup>26</sup>

Overnight, Nela Martinez suddenly became the first female Minister of Government in the country and kept the position for three days. In the midst of the revolution, Martinez was able to access tangible political power and utilize it without doubts about her legitimacy, subordination from the male members of ADE or apparent dissent from her fellow revolutionaries. As the Minister of Government, Martínez communicated with members of ADE and released prisoners like Raymond Mériguét, whose supposed Communist activities had him jailed months before. Martínez remembered:

[f]rom the Ministry, I ordered the liberation of the imprisoned, principally those of the Antifascist Movement who were in different provinces or confined in the Orient [Amazon], to fight against the Arroyo del Río regime. The whole country was informed that ADE had taken charge of the presidency of the republic; we asked sectional governments be organized, in order to prevent the actualization of a counter-revolution - although the ending is not exact. I ordered what needed to be ordered: the coordination of all activities on a national level.<sup>27</sup>

Despite her key activities during the revolution, the updates sent out by ADE during the three days of rebellion failed to mention her acts - the beginning of women's erasure from the history of the revolution. Since the police force was occupied fighting the civilian populace or defending their bases, Nela Martinez organized a group of students

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<sup>26</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 82; Nela Martínez, "Intervención en el acto por el día de la mujer realizado en la Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana," in *Insumisas, Textos Sobre las Mujeres: Nela Martínez Espinosa*, ed. Nela Meriguét Martínez (Quito: M&M Impresiones, 2012), 61-62

<sup>27</sup> Martínez, *Siempre*, 83.

and workers to patrol the city. She led the provisional government for three days without provisions or rest. In allotting tasks, the revolutionary leadership under the helm of Martinez continuously overrode gendered divisions: “[t]here was not a differentiation of responsibilities but instead the political action of everyone, a combination of interests to consolidate the revolution, lift ADE; a push to prevent what eventually occurred: the coup of dictatorial power by Velasco...”<sup>28</sup> For those participating in the revolution from May 28 to May 31, the chaos and breakdown of political order meant a rare nullification of twentieth-century Latin American gender norms. Much like the participation of Manuela Canizares and Manuela Saenz in the independence era, women could perform revolutionary acts, but more often out of the sake of need than from the acceptance of equal partnership by the male-dominated leadership. Nela Martinez and other women of AFE who participated hoped to make these temporary performances of gender equality a permanent aspect of the new democracy in Ecuador. The women who joined in the revolution, mainly members of AFE, hoped to expand their work in the antifascist movement and their domestic engagement into traditional political power. AFE had joined MPAE in order to utilize a transnational movement and rhetoric for the advancement of women. Their roles in the May Revolution of 1944 extended from antifascism into armed combat in the hopes that both would open opportunities for women in post-WWII Ecuador.

Documents from United States embassy in Quito also shed light on the American concern over the May Revolution and its global impact. The telegrams from the Ambassador in Ecuador, Robert Scotten, reported, “[a]ll information I have received thus

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

far indicates revolutionary movement is of purely domestic political nature and has not been initiated through Axis influence.”<sup>29</sup> For the United States, the real concern was ensuring that the revolution was not a result of Axis collaboration in the hemisphere. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, the Ecuadorian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Francisco Guarderas, asked Scotten if Carlos Arroyo del Río could take asylum in the United States embassy, which Scotten refused. Five hours later, Arroyo del Río resigned from power as violence in the city increased and mobs began to search for him. “A fairly orderly parade of approximately 10,000 people came to the Chancery,” states Scotten, and “inquired whether the President was in refuge...The demonstration passed and no incident occurred.” More importantly, Scotten stated that, “among the usual shouts against the Arroyo regime there were interspersed derogatory references to the Rio Protocol and the recent boundary settlement, also to the alleged loss of territory in the Oriente [Amazon].”<sup>30</sup> As Robert Scotten notes, the revolution in Quito contained a number of grievances against the government of Ecuador, but also the territorial loss from the Rio Protocol. Scotten later remarked that Velasco Ibarra promised free speech and suffrage to the people, yet had no legal basis to rule the country. But since:

[T]he revolution was not inspired by the Axis or by any foreign power and is of an entirely Ecuadoran [sic] political origin and as Velasco Ibarra, even though an illegal President, came into power with the support popularly estimated at over 90 percent of the people, it would not only do us no harm to give speedy recognition to the new government but on the contrary a prolonged delay in the recognition would create an unfriendly atmosphere generally throughout Ecuador which would work against our

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of State. “Recognition by the United States and Other American Republics of the New Government of Ecuador.” Foreign relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944. The American Republics Volume VII (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944) <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1944v07> (accessed May 20, 2013), 1036.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1037-1038.

best interests.<sup>31</sup>

By June 1, 1944, the government of Velasco Ibarra, which promised democracy in the region, was already recognized by the government of the United States. In the midst of a war in Europe and the Pacific, the concern of the United States was the installation of a government in Ecuador that did not harbor fascism and fell in line with US interests. The United States needed a government that would “fulfill its international obligations” and was “friendly to the United Nations war effort.”<sup>32</sup> When Velasco Ibarra promised to reject fascism and maintain hemispheric unity, he fulfilled the hopes of MPAE and the US embassy.<sup>33</sup>

The accounts of Isabel Herreria and Ana Moreno, members of ADE, again emphasize the transnational factors in the May Revolution. For both women, World War II, the fear of dictatorial expansion and imperialism, and the fight against fascism all helped to launch the movement against Arroyo del Río. The antifascist movement, which pushed forward the ideals of democracy, including freedom of speech, contributed to the aspirations of Ecuadorians before and after the May Revolution of 1944. Propaganda at the time of the revolution also argued for the incorporation of Indigenous groups into the body politic.<sup>34</sup> In Cayambe, Dolores Cacuango, Indigenous leader and activist, led armed forces to attack the *carabinero* barracks in the region. In doing so, Cacuango encapsulated the hopes of Indigenous groups for greater political rights, and their

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1041.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1041.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1042.

<sup>34</sup> Isabel Herriera and Ana Moreno, “El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana,” in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 240-245.



Unidentified photographer, Nela Martínez on a balcony during the May Revolution, 1944, Quito, photo, in Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 79.

willingness to join in the armed struggle against fascism and totalitarianism.<sup>35</sup>

On May 30, 1944, as *carabineros* were losing ground in Quito and Guayaquil and mobs roamed the streets looking for him, Carlos Arroyo del Río resigned from the presidency and took shelter in the Colombian embassy. *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* took charge throughout the country while the military, civilians and *carabineros* continued to have skirmishes. The next day, Velasco Ibarra arrived in Quito from Colombia to take the reigns of government. Manifestations of support, including rallies and marshes, materialized all over the country, while the *carabineros* formally

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<sup>35</sup> Marc Becker, "Race, Gender, and Protest in Ecuador," in *Work, Protest, and Identity in Twentieth-Century Latin America*, ed. Vincent C. Peloso (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 125.

submitted to the new government.<sup>36</sup> Carlos Arroyo del Río renounced the presidency on May 30, 1944 and Velasco Ibarra took power the next day, promising to hold elections and craft a new constitution. When Velasco Ibarra entered the Presidential Palace, Nela Martinez was waiting for him. She remarked:

Velasco conquered the people with his oratory. Afterwards, in the palace, he read his complete nominations for the Cabinet and I realized he had these [appointments] resolved beforehand. When he entered the office, he asked me what he could do for me, where I wanted to stay now that the country owed me so much. I answered that I had done my duty and that I now waited for him to complete his. I said goodbye and left.<sup>37</sup>

The abrupt conclusion of the revolution brought with it the hopes and aspirations of an expanded democracy, the reconstruction of Ecuador (economically, morally, and territorially), independence from US dominion, and greater reforms for laborers, Indigenous groups, and women. Nela Martinez left her post in order to realize the ambitions of ADE. Velasco Ibarra was finally in power. And despite her active leadership and the participation of numerous women in the antifascist and anti-Arroyo movement, the histories and memories constructed after the revolution failed to note their contribution, just as the revolution ultimately failed to bring about substantive social change.

### **Remembering *La Gloriosa***

An important and overlooked aspect of the May Revolution of 1944 was the deliberate and continued (re)construction of its memory and revisionism which began during the regime of Velasco Ibarra. By exploring gender and antifascism, one finds the social construction of the revolution's memory along with the erasure of certain

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<sup>36</sup> "Renuncio Anoche el Presidente de la Republica," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 30, 1944; "El Dr. Velasco Ibarra llegara hoy a Quito," *El Comercio*, Quito, May 31, 1944.

<sup>37</sup> Martinez, *Siempre*, 84.



participants - mainly women and leftists. One of the first instances of the artificial construction of the revolution's memory occurred upon Velasco's first visit to Guayaquil after taking office in Quito. On June 4, 1944, Velasco Ibarra made a speech to a crowd of 80,000 people in Guayaquil. The speech encompassed Velasco Ibarra's typical rhetorical style: the attack of his enemies, an emphasis on morality, a lack of substantial promises for reform, and praise of the people (*pueblo*).<sup>38</sup> He stated:

You all, in this solemn moment of the nation's history, are showing the world that the material is only a transitory aspect of the life of man; that what is eternal is the striving for moral greatness...Guayaquileños, who have written another glorious episode in your history...Heroic pueblo whom I love and with whom I feel connected, after bearing four years of the most ignoble of tyrannies, confusion, and fright in the national soul...wresting from the police the absolute power that they maintained through the person of a despot who promoted the arbitrary disposition of the national territory and of her revenues, the squandering of public funds, the corruption of local government, of the Judicial Power, and of all the Nation.<sup>39</sup>

Velasco Ibarra's speech demonstrates the immediate reconstruction of the revolution's memory. Ibarra and his supporters had already begun inserting the term 'glorious' in association with the May Revolution. Despite the numerous deaths during the days of street fighting, supporters of the Velasco regime struck out the horrors of the three days and nights in favor of a popular memory. By June 14<sup>th</sup>, supporters of Velasco began calling the revolution, "*La Gloriosa*", ("the glorious (*la gloriosa*), orderly and triumphant revolution of the 28 of May...").<sup>40</sup> The music and poetry produced after the revolution

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<sup>38</sup> For more on Velasco Ibarra's populism, see: Ximena Sosa-Buchholz, "Changing Images of Male and Female in Ecuador: José María Velasco Ibarra and Abdalá Bucaram," in *Gender and Populism in Latin America: Passionate Politics*, ed. Karen Kampwirth, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2010), 47-66.

<sup>39</sup> José María Velasco Ibarra, "Heroic Pueblo of Guayaquil," June 4, 1944 in *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Carlos De La Torre and Steve Striffler (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 185-186.

<sup>40</sup> El Frente Electoral Velasquista, "A los Ecuatorianos" June 14, 1944, flyer, doc. 48, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador; Although the term glorious may have been

also served to glorify Velasco Ibarra and the downfall of Carlos Arroyo del Río. For example, “The Song of the Country: March of Velasco Ibarra” (*El Canto del Pueblo: Marcha Velasco Ibarra*) by Jose Romero y Cordero and Constantino Mendoza M. referred to Velasco Ibarra as the “sun of his country (*pueblo*)” whose radiance “killed all of the shadows which darkened Ecuador.” It emphasized the “glorious Revolution” and hailed the new president.<sup>41</sup> For every interest group that participated, there existed as many attempts to capitalize on the construction of May 28th’s memory. As a result, those with traditional access to power and influence crafted the revolution to serve patriotic, nationalist, or personal aims, while alternative accounts and experiences were silenced.

Sergio Giron’s account stressed the military’s participation during the days of fighting in the city. His submission to the newspaper *La Patria*, along with numerous other accounts, proclaims that the entire revolution belonged to the army. It further argues that ADE played only a secondary role in the revolution, and completely passes over the role of Nela Martinez and the civilian population. Meanwhile, Franklin Perez Castro’s account underemphasizes the crucial role of Dolores Cacuangó in raising Indigenous antifascist sentiment in favor of a man. When asked in an interview who led the Indigenous movement in Cayambe, he stated, “[t]he Indigenous and labor movement was led by [Ruben] Rodriguez.” The interviewer then said, “With Dolores Cacuangó, it seems to me.” Castro, in response, stated, “I think so. Rodriguez knew the issues, he knew them well...”<sup>42</sup> In regards to women like Dolores Cacuangó, the memory of the

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utilized by mid-twentieth-century Ecuadorians due to hopes for a truly utopian reconstruction of the country, the contemporary use of the nickname (with the benefit of hindsight) should be reconsidered.

<sup>41</sup> “El Canto del Pueblo,” Post-1944, music sheet, Hojas Volantes 1943-1945, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>42</sup> Castro and Zavala, *Así*, 14.

revolution and their contribution to its development could be easily forgotten by their male comrades.

Members of the antifascist movement, like Raymond Mériquet, utilized the memory of the revolution in order to place Ecuador's struggles in an international context as part of the Allied front in World War II. The magazine *Ultimas Noticias* claimed that Arroyo del Río's government did not represent democracy, and Ecuador's May Revolution contributed to the global fight against totalitarianism.<sup>43</sup> A number of leftists also attempted to rework the country's memory, critiquing the ideals of patriotism and freedom that Velasco Ibarra and his followers espoused. Jose Vincente Trujillo argued to discard the nickname of "*Gloriosa*", especially considering the counter-revolution of Velasco Ibarra after May 28<sup>th</sup>. The leftist magazine *Surcos* claimed that May 28 had been sensationalized since no significant change ever occurred, especially for Indigenous groups.<sup>44</sup> But even the political left did not remain untouched by the power dynamics in memory reconstruction. In Socialist Party propaganda on the May Revolution, a gender neutral recounting of the participants in the revolution wiped away the contributions of women.<sup>45</sup> In an interview a few weeks after the revolution, Nela Martinez emphasized the key roles women had played throughout the history of Ecuador, especially on May 28<sup>th</sup>, and the hope that Velasco Ibarra would push for women's rights.<sup>46</sup> But despite their

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<sup>43</sup> "Gran Asamblea popular se realizará esta mañana en la plaza 'Arenas'," *El Comercio*, Quito, June 11, 1944; "Mirador del Mundo," *Ultimas Noticias*, Quito, June 12, 1944; Ricardo Paredes, "La Política Internacional," 1946, booklet, Partido Comunista Miscellanea, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador.

<sup>44</sup> Jose Vincente Ordeñana Trujillo, "Una revolución traicionada," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 55; "Dolores Cacuango," *Surcos*, Quito, April 24, 1945.

<sup>45</sup> Manuel Agustín Aguirre, *El Partido Socialista en la revolución del 28 de mayo* (Quito: Partido Socialista, Departamento de Publicaciones, 1945).

<sup>46</sup> "Nela Martínez y un Repórter de 'Adelante'," *Adelante* 2, July 7, 1944, 3.

attempts, women, Indigenous groups, and other actors could not stop their own erasure or Velasco Ibarra's appropriation of the revolution. Long after the revolution, when testimonies were being gathered by the University of Guayaquil for publication, María Augusta Pólit Ortiz submitted a testimony, stating, "Although you did not ask me for information on the May Revolution, my modest persona, in honor of the truth and because I have always participated in the civic struggles of my country...allows me to send this memory (*mensaje recordatorio*) of that phase in our country's history."<sup>47</sup> Her role in the revolution included organizing a parade in Bahía on May 24, 1944, which brought together women and men in order to raise pro-Velasco Ibarra sentiment. María Augusta Pólit Ortiz, while not a combatant in the May Revolution, played a crucial role in gaining supporters for Velasco Ibarra despite her belief that it was a "modest contribution."<sup>48</sup> In his May 28, 1945 speech, one year after the revolution, Velasco Ibarra lauded the military's glorious and patriotic battle against a tyrannical dictatorship and police forces, the end of electoral fraud, immorality, and totalitarianism, and the free suffrage and constitutional democracy that would come. He remained silent on the role of Nela Martinez, *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* and the men and women of *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario Ecuatoriano*.<sup>49</sup>

After the May Revolution, the alliance of leftists, Liberals, Conservatives and Communists underwent strain and eventually fell apart. Initial reactions to the revolution were hopeful - women like Nela Martinez expected an expansion of democracy and

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<sup>47</sup> María Augusta Pólit Ortiz, "La Revolución de Mayo," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 198.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>49</sup> José María Velasco Ibarra, "Discurso Pronunciado por Velasco Ibarra, El día 28 de Mayo 1945 en la Plaza Centenario," May 28, 1945, speech, 983.25 V433mis C6, Fondo General, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polít, Quito, Ecuador.

greater role in the politics of Ecuador under the regime of Velasco Ibarra. As this chapter demonstrated, May 28<sup>th</sup> encompassed various ideologies and motivations, which were influenced by domestic and international phenomena. In their revolutionary participation, men and women fought for what they considered to be democracy and antifascism in the Ecuadorian context. But in the construction of the revolution's legacy, political parties and their leaders from both the left and the right kept women out of the memory despite their immense contributions. Beyond the deliberate erasure of women, the "winners" of the revolution, namely Velasco Ibarra and his followers, actively whitewashed the numerous tragedies and deaths which occurred all over the country during the revolt. The result was a socially constructed "*Gloriosa*" revolution that excised divisions and outliers to the *velasquista* movement. Unlike antifascism, which brought together a diverse set of reformers, the politics of Velasco Ibarra only served to break down the alliances built during the anti-Carlos Arroyo del Río movements. While women, men, Indigenous groups and leftists saw both the May Revolution of 1944 and the subsequent reforms as an opening for the expansion of democracy, José María Velasco Ibarra proved to be no different than Carlos Arroyo del Río.



Masses welcoming Velasco Ibarra to Guayaquil.  
Unidentified photographer, Jose María Velasco Ibarra and others, 1944, Guayaquil, photo.

## Epilogue

On May 21, 2013, the Foundation *Causana* for Feminist Lesbian Action (*Fundación Causana Acción Lésbica Femenista*) published, on the social media network Facebook, its Lesbian Feminist Manifesto. It stated the goals and struggles of the LGBT movement in Ecuador and ended with the declaration: “We continue fighting with the learning (*aprendizaje*) of those we admire, Tránsito Amaguaña and Dolores Cacuango!”<sup>1</sup> The re-appropriation of the images of two militant Indigenous activists demonstrates the constant battle over the memory of historical actors and events in Ecuador. When Velasco Ibarra and his supporters reconstructed the memory of May 28, it was in the midst of a battle for the hearts and minds of a populace that had been held together by the goals of a revolution, the tenets of antifascism, and the shared discontent of the Liberal party. The result was an erasure of leftists, women, and Indigenous groups by means of omission and the curbing of their aspirations for greater equality — an erasure contested in the present day and an equality still sought after by reformers.

Ecuador’s May Revolution of 1944 ended on May 31, 1944 upon the arrival of José María Velasco Ibarra in Quito and the submission of the police force. Members of *Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana* (ADE; Ecuadorian Democratic Alliance), *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* (AFE; Ecuadorian Women’s Alliance) and *Movimiento Popular Antitotalitario de Ecuador* (MPAE; Popular Anti-totalitarian Movement of Ecuador) who had participated in the revolt returned to their homes and awaited the promised democracy of Velasco Ibarra. In the months following the revolution and Velasco Ibarra’s recognition by the National Assembly as Constitutional President of the

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<sup>1</sup> Fundación Causana’s Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/fundacion.causana> (Accessed May 21, 2013); *Causana* is a Quechua term meaning “to live life.”

## Manifiesto Lésbico Feminista

### 17 de mayo Día de Lucha Contra la Homofobia

**Como Plataforma de Mujeres LBT** en el Ecuador a propósito del Día Internacional de Lucha Contra la Homofobia que, en nuestros casos se visibiliza además como lesbo, trans y bi fobia dirigida hacia quienes vivimos una sexualidad no heterosexual y que, a raíz de esta experiencia de vida hemos identificado a la "hetero-normalización" como un mecanismo de dominación hacia nuestros cuerpos y nuestras vidas, nos pronunciamos sobre la institución del matrimonio sobre la que en el mundo actual se ha concentrado el debate al tratarse el matrimonio igualitario, consigna llevada a la efervescencia.

**Para nosotras** ésta se ha construido como entidad que regula el parentesco, el estatus de las mujeres en un sentido de subordinación, y sobre todo en un "deber ser" incuestionable y naturalizado. El dominio de las mujeres pasa de propiedad del "padre" a propiedad del "marido".

**Frente a esta** institución del sistema patriarcal perverso seguimos con la incógnita de si realmente es esa la garantía que buscamos como Movimiento LGBTI, que si es esa la lucha encarnizada que habremos de iniciar frente a la moralina del poder arraigado en el "modo de ser" de los Estados. No llegamos a conclusiones que abarquen este fenómeno, que además viene de fuera, con una mirada pensada desde el poder adquisitivo y el consumismo.

**Pensamos** que estas iniciativas responden a un imaginario urbano-céntrico que, pese a los discursos de igualdad ante la ley, solo evidencian la diametral distancia que existe entre los centros poblados más grandes y el resto del país. Frente a estas iniciativas nos preguntamos: ¿cuántas organizaciones LGBTI existen fuera de estos polos de desarrollo local? ¿cuáles son las necesidades de las personas de condición sexogenérica diversa en los otros rincones de la nación?, ¿cómo nos estamos planteando la diversidad sexual en cuanto a la etnia, clase y otros factores de discriminación que actúan junto a la homofobia?

**De cara a** estas disyuntivas y reconociendo los aportes invaluable de los movimientos indígenas que en el Ecuador nos brindó la posibilidad de reconocernos unidos en la diversidad y que ha evidenciado los niveles de desigualdad y colonización, nos ratificamos en que el matrimonio no fue y no ha sido una propuesta de lucha desde nuestras necesidades colectivas, que entendemos perfectamente esta iniciativa a razón de las contradicciones constitucionales que nos posicionan como sujetos de derechos pero que páginas más tarde nos limita el ejercicio pleno de nuestras maternidades y paternidades dentro de un contexto de familias diversas, que los derechos colectivos han logrado entendernos como un movimiento potente, pero que debemos analizar también las intenciones direccionadas desde ciertos organismos de financiamiento internacional, vinculados a grandes intereses geopolíticos, que propugnan "libertad e igualdad en la pobreza" desde agendas previamente construidas con la finalidad de modificar a su favor las posiciones regionales.

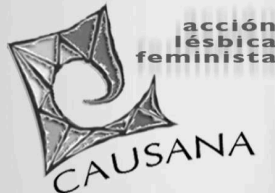
**Para muchas** de nosotras la lucha empieza por la des-patologización de las diversidades sexuales que, a pesar de haber sido retiradas de los manuales de afecciones mentales, en la práctica son evidentes y cotidianas a todo nivel. Una muestra institucionalizada la podemos ver en los supuestos "centros de recuperación" que tratan el tema bajo la figura de trastornos en la conducta.

**Mientras** el espacio público sea de dominio heterosexual, clasista, mestizo y sobre todo patriarcal y machista nuestras vidas se encontrarán desplazadas y marginadas. Este fenómeno se potencializa para las lesbianas cuando erradamente se determina desde el Estado que, por no tener un "macho" que nos tutele, nuestras hijas se encuentran en el limbo jurídico dejándolas en la indefensión y sin derechos. ¿El matrimonio corregiría esta situación o solamente la normalizaría maquillándola en las leyes a pesar de la práctica social que la condena?

**En esta línea** de pensamiento reflexionamos y llamamos a todas a hacerlo desde varios puntos de vista tomando en cuenta que el matrimonio no es la única vía para reconocer a las familias. Las familias diversas existimos y estamos generándonos constantemente. ¿Hace falta casarse para ser y hacer familia? El artículo 67 de nuestra Constitución Ecuatoriana es un enunciado que hay que llevar a la práctica rechazando posiciones fundamentalistas que reprueban la diversidad y otras gubernamentales que pretenden hechar tierra sobre los avances conseguidos haciendo caso únicamente a su vena populista.

**Nuestra lucha** no solo se limita a los derechos Gays, como la prensa amarillista la ha catalogado, porque esta se interseca con la de los movimientos sociales, étnicos, ambientalistas, sindicales, anticolonialistas, contraculturales, desde una profunda raíz feminista.

**Seguiremos luchando con el aprendizaje  
de nuestras admiradas  
Tránsito Amaguaña y Dolores Cacuango!**



Foundation *Causana*'s Lesbian Feminist Manifesto, Facebook, 2013.

Republic, unprecedented changes occurred in Ecuador. Velasco Ibarra approved the 1945 Constitution, considered one of Ecuador's most progressive, which limited the powers of the executive branch. Presidential use of veto and emergency powers also came under control, decentralizing the government and giving official recognition to other political



parties.<sup>2</sup> The country also elected the politically diverse 1944-1945 National Assembly, in which each major political group (Communists, Socialists, Liberals, Conservatives and even Indigenous) obtained representatives. Out of the Assembly's available 98 seats, Socialists garnered 31, Communists gained 9, Liberals kept 29 and Conservatives kept 24. Interest groups, such as teachers, women's groups, and students, won another 35 functional representative seats (a form of subsidiary representation), one of which was held by Nela Martínez, the first woman to do so in history.<sup>3</sup> Outside of the more formal political positions they now occupied, members of the *Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana* continued their work of engaging with the poor and illiterate and advancing women's rights in Ecuador until its dissolution in the 1960s under the dictatorship of Ramón Castro Jijón.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Raymond Meriguet and Nela Martínez kept in contact after the 1940s, eventually marrying in 1951.

Indigenous groups also took advantage of the brief opening ushered in by the May Revolution. In August of 1944, the *Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios* (FEI; Indigenous Federation of Ecuador) was founded. Its goals included the economic emancipation of Ecuador's Indigenous groups and their incorporation into the nation. Interestingly, FEI also hoped to establish links of solidarity with all American Indigenous groups, revealing the early development of Pan-American and transnational Indigenous connections and

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<sup>2</sup> Jose Santos Rodriguez, "Aspectos fundamentales de la Constitución de 1945," in *El 28 de Mayo de 1944: Testimonio*, ed. Elias Muñoz Vicuña (Guayaquil: Litografía e Impr. de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1984), 163-187.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Becker, "Requirements to be a Citizen in 1944 Ecuador," in the E-archivo ecuatoriano, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/1944citizenship.php#> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 113.

identity.<sup>5</sup> FEI would grow to be one of the most important Indigenous organizations in Ecuador's history, with Dolores Cacuango serving as one of its leaders.

However, the brief utopia of broad and democratic representation in government came to a swift end upon Velasco Ibarra's dismissal of the National Assembly and declaration of his dictatorship. Regardless of his initial "leftist of the heart" appearance, Velasco Ibarra returned to his traditional right-wing, pro-oligarchy and export-market politics, resulting in a complete alienation of the left and a breakdown of ADE. On March 30, 1946, Velasco Ibarra declared himself dictator, claiming it necessary for the good of the republic. His announcement marked the end of the brief period of reform and advancement that leftists and activists had hoped to capitalize on. He crafted a new constitution that revived centralized power in the presidency and suspended the National Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Months before his seizure of power, critics noted the mismanagement and corruption present in the Velasco Ibarra government. His attacks on the Rio Protocol became subject to scrutiny considering his lack of tangible action, and many dissenters remarked that Arroyo del Río had returned in the form of Velasco Ibarra.<sup>7</sup> But even before such accusations, reformers and leftists had long since recognized Velasco Ibarra's conservative past (especially during his first presidency) and his wary alliance with the left. Therefore, a lingering question exists: if leftists were aware of Velasco Ibarra's

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<sup>5</sup> Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 82-85.

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Vega Ugalde, *La Gloriosa: de la revolución del 28 de mayo de 1944 a la contrarrevolución velasquista* (Quito: Editorial El Conejo, 1987), 122-127.

<sup>7</sup> "Reconstrucción Nacional, Escandalo Sin Nombre," March 1945, flyer, Hojas Volantes 1940-1980, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador; Jorge Chacón, "Fiesta da Recordacion Nacional," August 18, 1945, flyer, Hojas Volantes 1940-1980, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador; Comité Popular Electoral Oriente, "Ha Vuelto Arroyo a la Presidencia," November 9, 1945, flyer, Hojas Volantes 1940-1980, Biblioteca Aurelio Espinosa Polit, Quito, Ecuador.

right-wing tendencies, why did they choose him as their candidate and ally with ADE? The answer comes down to pragmatism. During his exile in Chile, Velasco Ibarra wrote in the Communist publication *El Siglo*, claiming his policies and ideology shifted to the left. Subsequently, he began reaching out to members of the Socialist and Communist parties, hoping to create a broad alliance in Ecuador. When ADE was choosing its candidate, Velasco Ibarra stood out as the prime candidate. As Nela Martínez notes, the decision of the left to support Velasco Ibarra came down to the realistic notion that no one else could possibly sway the populace the way he could. As a candidate of the masses, he had the most likely chance of being elected. Through him, leftists hoped they could enact the broad reforms they wanted to see in the country, and because many believed anyone was better than Carlos Arroyo del Río.<sup>8</sup>

Immediately upon his ascension to the dictatorship, women (both AFE and non-AFE) voiced their opposition. Their protests echoed the calls for the defense of democracy and expansion of civil liberties similar to the days of anti-Arroyo del Río organizing. In an open letter to Velasco Ibarra published in the paper *El Día*, AFE condemned Velasco Ibarra stating:

We Ecuadorian women, who at one time elevated your name like a flag of hope before national anguish, who accompanied our dead clamoring for justice, who risked tranquility and life to shatter the governmental tyrannies of the past and bring you to power - believing that you represented a spirit of moral and tangible reconstruction of the country - we have come to tell you to hear the clamor of the Ecuadorian citizens and to avoid civil war and the economic chaos by retiring immediately and voluntarily the Presidency of the Republic, which you have violated upon breaking the constitution and the laws which guide the legal and

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<sup>8</sup> Nela Martínez Espinosa, *Yo Siempre he sido Nela Martínez Espinosa: una autobiografía hablada* (Quito: CONAMU, 2005), 79-80; Franklin Perez Castro and Jaime Galarza Zavala, *Así Fue El 28 De Mayo: Conversaciones Con Jaime Galarza Zavala* (Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1990), 13.

democratic life of the country.<sup>9</sup>

Just as they had joined their voices to the antifascist movement and anti-Arroyo campaigns, the women of AFE maintained their mission of inserting themselves into national politics by calling upon Velasco Ibarra to resign from office. In doing so, AFE proceeded with its mission of expanding and defending democracy against totalitarianism. In their own participation in the revolution, Ecuadorian women had taken great risks by supporting Velasco Ibarra in the hopes of garnering a space in the promised democracy. Initially, he represented alleviation from Arroyo del Río and a chance to reconstruct the democracy of Ecuador with a place for women. To prevent further bloodshed, AFE called for Velasco Ibarra's resignation because he had done the opposite of expand democracy. He ended it. The letter further denounced Velasco Ibarra's failure to defend the people, utilizing anti-fascist rhetoric to denounce his dictatorship as an enemy to the aspirations of the May Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

By 1946, the utopia of the May Revolution had come to an end. As a result of his repressive policies and alienation of all but his closest confidantes, Velasco Ibarra's Liberal and leftist followers abandoned support. In 1947, the Minister of National Defense, Colonel Carlos Manecho, led a coup that overthrew Velasco Ibarra and installed a temporary military junta.<sup>11</sup> José María Velasco Ibarra would be elected three more times in Ecuador's history (1952, 1960, and 1968), each time without a revolution to place him into power.

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<sup>9</sup> "Carta Abierta al señor doctor don José María Velasco Ibarra," *El Día*, Quito, April 17, 1946

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ugalde, *Gloriosa*, 128-133.

The goals of the May Revolution, such as the expansion of democracy and an end to electoral fraud, found diverse levels of success. But despite the May Revolution's many failures, some important gains were made for marginalized groups, including leftists, women, and Indigenous groups. The Socialist and Communist parties gained broader political representation, even if only for a brief moment. Indigenous groups obtained a voice in the Assembly and successfully established FEI. Women, for the first time in history, were represented in the country's National Assembly, and AFE came out of the May Revolution with a renewed dedication to political rights and poverty relief. The revolution's success, therefore, cannot be measured by the rise and fall of Velasco Ibarra, but by the movements of women and Indigenous groups it helped to strengthen.

The intersection of the antifascism and the May Revolution of 1944 provided a brief moment and rare space for political power to be dispersed and redistributed amongst various groups. Communists such as Raymond Meriguet and Nela Martinez followed Comintern policies of the Popular Front, but also engaged with distinctly Ecuadorian realities, creating a hybrid of Ecuadorian antifascist organization and alliances which broadened labor and women's rights. Indigenous groups also utilized antifascism to access political power, while Conservatives and Liberals chose to affiliate with a growing transnational movement against totalitarianism that benefitted traditional partisan politics. Applying a gendered approach with an international lens, one can see how ideological currents could be manipulated by various interest groups to advance their causes. The gendered dynamics in the revolution unveil the diverse aspirations of its participants, and their application of global trends to domestic circumstances. Doing so changes the

understanding of the history of the May Revolution in Ecuador, the reasons for its failure to bring about large social change, and the fragmentary construction of its memory.



Women voting in the 1944-1945 elections.  
Unidentified photographer, Jose María Velasco Ibarra and others, Quito, 1944, photo.

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